Quiet Little Monsters

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/18070322.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Alana Bloom, Jack Crawford, Beverly Katz, Will Graham's Dogs, Dr. Frederick Chilton, Matthew Brown (Hannibal), Francis Dolarhyde, Jimmy Price, Brian Zeller, Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Abigail Hobbs
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Bodyguard, Bodyguard!Hannibal, Assassin!Hannibal, (former) - Freeform, Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper, Sick Will Graham, Ravenstag, And other fun hallucinations, Hurt/Comfort, Protective Hannibal Lecter, Manipulative Hannibal Lecter, Polar (movie), Inspired by Polar, NOT in the Polar universe, Slow Burn, House sharing, Sharing a Bed, Canon-Typical Violence, Torture, Blood and Gore
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-03-11 Updated: 2019-08-22 Words: 25,282 Chapters: 6/?

Quiet Little Monsters

by SordidDetailsFollowing

Summary

Will Graham is receiving death threats. He's not particularly worried, but Jack Crawford insists on hiring someone to keep him safe from harm. Will is *extremely* reluctant to have anyone invade the privacy of his home and his mind, especially the strangest bodyguard he's ever had the displeasure to meet, but there's simply no getting the idea out of Jack's stubborn skull. Not without a hammer and an insanity plea.

Hannibal Lecter, a contract killer turned bodyguard, enjoys his job. It's an interesting challenge, keeping people alive, especially considering how he spends the rest of his time. He appreciates the irony. When he is contacted by the FBI, of all organizations, to protect one of their own profilers from death threats of an unknown origin, he simply can’t turn down the opportunity for such delicious indulgence.

Notes

Welcome, delightful readers!

This work is inspired by Polar, which made me crave a contract killer Hannibal, and my weakness for a good bodyguard AU. There will be some angst, some fluff, and a healthy dose of Protective Hannibal.

I don't think I'll be able to maintain a strict update schedule, but I will try to get a chapter out every couple of weeks or so.

Quiet little voices creep into my head,
I'm young again.

Quiet little monsters creep into my bedroom wall,
I'll fall for you.

Quiet words of wisdom creep into your victim's ears,
I'll die for you.

In any which direction, call me.
I will run for you.
I'll come for you.

I'll die for you.
I'll come for you.

Work Title: Quiet Little Voices - We Were Promised Jetpacks
Chapter Title: Creature - It Looks Sad.

I Lost My Lungs, I Don't Really Need 'Em

“No.”

“Will, this isn’t a discussion.”

“No, Jack.”

“I’ve already spoken to the deputy director, and he’s given his approval to contract this one out. He agrees that it’s the best – ”

“Damnit, I said no!” Will slammed his hands down on the edge of the sink, refusing to lift his eyes to meet Jack’s in the mirror. He couldn’t believe they were having this conversation.

“Would you rather I put you in protective custody?”

He couldn’t believe they were having this conversation in the bathroom of the FBI academy.

“Because I can do that, Will. I can do that right now.”

He spun around, bracing himself against the counter, fingers curled over the fake marble and chin tucked to his chest so he wouldn’t have to look above Jack’s collar bone. “You don’t have reasonable cause to take me into custody, and you know it.”

“When a federal agent is in danger, his commanding officer has the right to – ”

“I’m not an agent.” He could see Jack’s hands curling into fists at his sides, growing more agitated at each interruption.

“You’re on my team, Will. That means you’re my responsibility.”

“Then I quit.”

“You’d still be my responsibility.” Jack’s voice was rising. He was beginning to lose his patience for this conversation. “When the job puts one of our own in danger, we do what we have to – ”

“I’m not in danger, Jack.” Will could feel his face twisting into a sneer around the word, disdainful of the very idea that he was in any real peril.

“You’re receiving death threats, Graham!” He stalked forward into Will’s space, volume now at a proper bellow, unheeding of the way Will flinched into the counter and turned his head away. “What the hell do you call that? It’s the very definition of a threat to life and limb. Even if you were just a civilian on the street, I could put you under protective surveillance at the very least.”

It was getting hard to breath, Jack looming so close that Will could smell his sweat, feel the anger and assertion on his breath. He ducked out from under Jack’s oppressive stance and

paced across the room, rubbing both hands over his face to try and expel the gauzy film that seemed to lay over his senses. His head was pounding.

Jack took a moment to calm himself down. Or maybe to let Will calm down, though it didn't help. "This is the best option for you." He softened his voice, made himself sound more reasonable. "The least obtrusive to your life. I don't want to disturb your routine, pull you out of your home."

Will scoffed in disbelief. "You want to assign someone to watch me, twenty-four seven. I'd say that's both obtrusive *and* fucking disturbing."

"It's better than having a team of agents on you, working in shifts and following check-in protocols. You know what that entails." He stepped towards Will again, but remained a few paces away, allowing him his personal space. "This way you only have to deal with one person, and much less bureaucratic red tape."

Jack didn't understand. He couldn't comprehend that having someone there, watching him, with him all the time, was just as bad as being locked up in a safe house. Will's solitude was his sanity. His privacy was as necessary to him as eating and sleeping. More so, even, since it wasn't like he got much sleep anyway.

Will paced back to the line of sinks and twisted the tap, bending to duck his head into the basin and splash cold water onto his face. It didn't do much to clear the white noise from his mind, but it allowed him to keep his eyes closed for a moment while water dripped from the ends of his hair.

"I can't believe you want to hire me a *bodyguard*."

He could feel Jack's displeasure in the air. "Private security." He corrected. And, after a moment. "He comes highly recommended."

Will didn't respond. He had nothing else to say, and the silence stretched awkwardly between them until Jack broke it with a sigh, turning on his heel to walk back towards the men's room door. "Just meet him, Will. We can do a trial run. See what we can dig up on these threats in the meantime."

He grit his teeth and answered without looking up. "I'll meet him, but that's it. I'm not making any promises."

Jack left without another word. And somehow, even though Will hadn't agreed to anything, he still managed to feel like Agent Crawford stepped out of the room with an air of satisfaction, as if he'd already gotten exactly what he wanted.

Will didn't hesitate to pack up his things and leave after the end of each lecture. His students rarely asked him any questions after class, aware of his reputation for answering their queries with more questions and extra essay assignments. He didn't do it to punish them, truly; he did it because it was the best way to learn the material. He would have thought more bureau

trainees would appreciate his methods, but it suited him just fine that they were more prone to avoiding him. He certainly wasn't in the teaching profession for the social interactions.

So it surprised him when Alana Bloom caught him in his lecture hall before he was able to slip out to the parking lot and drive away, as was his usual routine.

She meandered into the classroom as the last of his students trickled out, each click of her heels careful and casual. She was, as usual, dressed very nicely. Will liked the way her hair fell in supple waving curls over her shoulder; it made her feel soft around the edges.

"Hello, Dr. Bloom." He greeted her, eyes on his briefcase as he pointlessly shuffled papers inside.

"Hello, Will." She came to a stop beside his lectern, hands folded in front of her stomach, and glanced slowly around the room. She often avoided his eyes, and Will knew it was an effort to relieve him of the perceived pressure of making eye contact. "You've got a lot of students taking your course this semester."

He didn't bother to shrug in feigned humility, nor to keep the light twist of bitterness from his tone when he responded. "It's always a popular selection." He focused on closing the leather buckles on his bag. "Every aspiring agent wants to hunt serial killers."

"I think they'd rather catch them." Alana corrected gently, and he could hear the smile in her voice. "That's why they come to you."

He did shrug then, unsure of how to react to the statement. He raised his gaze to the level of her mouth and tried to arrange his own into a mirroring smile. "What are you doing here, Dr. Bloom? Has Crawford sent you to plead his case?"

She sighed, clearly disappointed that he had given up on pleasantries and gotten right to the unpolished point of the matter. "No, actually. Though I did hear about all of that. I won't bother to force my opinion on the matter."

Will's smile turned wry. "No. You've come with another opinion."

"I have."

That was something Will had always respected about Alana Bloom. She might make him feel like less of a person by going out of her way *not* to treat him like a case study, but at least she was always honest with him. It was frankly amazing how few people he could say that about.

"Well." He stepped out from behind the lectern and leaned against it, crossing his arms over his chest. "Better get on with it then. Wouldn't want to be alone in a room with me for any longer than necessary."

He immediately regretted the words as a flicker of hurt passed over Alana's face, but he couldn't exactly take them back. They were truthful, after all.

She took a short breath before speaking, and the moment of hesitation that lingered in the curve of her mouth made it clear that the topic she was about to broach would be a delicate

one. Will did his best to mentally brace himself for something he would most certainly not want to hear.

“I’m worried about you, Will.” She raised one hand as if to stop him from saying anything in protest, even though he hadn’t moved to speak. “And not just because of the threats. I think… I think you may be more likely to suffer psychological consequences than come to any real physical harm.”

His gaze slid towards the ceiling and he raised his eyebrows, nodding slowly. “You’re more concerned for my mental well-being.” He found the words coming out over-articulated, weighted with something that was not dissimilar to scorn. “Tell me. Do you think I am, even *more* unstable than usual?”

“You know that’s not what I’m saying. Not exactly.” It wasn’t a no. “But you have to realize, Will, after what happened on the Shrike case…”

A hundred moving images flooded his mind, flash shots of dead girls and thickets of antlers, a kitchen bathed in blood and blue staring eyes. Many of the images of murder, both reverent and horrific, were pulled from life, but just as many were imagined and lived in his own head. All held the unshakable quality of memory, all just as real to him as watching the Hobbs family being slaughtered atop yellow linoleum.

When he came back to himself, fingers digging in where he gripped his own arms, he could feel Alana watching him carefully. She didn’t have the same insight that he did, not even close, but sometimes he felt as if she could see through the front of his skull to catch a glimpse of what was happening inside.

“I made a recommendation to Jack.” She spoke slowly, gently, as if calming a frightened animal. “I told him I think you should see a therapist.”

Will scoffed and pushed away from the lectern to pace across the room, unable to contain the itch of frustration beneath his skin. “You know how I feel about being psychoanalyzed, Dr. Bloom.”

He could feel the sigh that she repressed even though he couldn’t see the tight press of her lips, facing away from her as he was. “I know. But this wouldn’t be like the experiences you’ve had in the past. You’d be going to deal with one trauma in particular, and you wouldn’t necessarily have to talk about anything else, if you don’t want to.”

He turned to shoot her a disbelieving look. “You know as well as I do that’s not really how it works.”

“Maybe not, but I know someone that I think you could work with.” She took a step towards him, and he hated how appeasing she was trying to be. “She’s very discreet. Not the type to push any further than you’re comfortable with, and she has quick and extremely accurate insight.”

“No.”

“She could help you, Will.” Alana closed the space between them and lay a tentative hand on his arm. “Dr. Du Maurier was my mentor at Johns Hopkins. I trust her.”

He stepped away from her touch, spinning to stride back to the lectern and pick up his briefcase. “No, Alana. I’m saying no.”

“I told Jack that I don’t recommend any further field service until you’ve agreed to see someone.” She was making her tone hard now, the set of her jaw stubborn and unwilling, and the desperation Will could feel on her was abrasive to his already frayed nerves. “I don’t want to force you, but Jack knows how necessary I think this is.”

His bark of laughter had a rough edge to it. “Jack’s already forcing one person into my life, intruding on my privacy and peace of mind. He’s not going to push it by forcing this as well.” He made himself meet Alana’s eyes, just for a second, long enough to impress his seriousness though he shied away from the sincere worry that shone out of her like a beacon. “You know where his priorities lie, and it’s never been with my mental wellbeing.”

He wasn’t bitter. Not really. It was a more pragmatic concern, that Will remain alive to continue solving murders and catching killers. It did hurt, though, to watch Alana crumple under the realization that he was right.

He took a moment to soften himself, to reel in the snapping tension that was his constant companion. “Thank you. For your concern. But it’s not necessary, alright?”

The smile he arranged on his mouth felt a little too sharp around the edges. “I’m fine.”

The bite of wind against the backs of Will’s eyelids was soothing to the dull ache still lingering in the front of his skull. The breeze ruffled through his hair, unseasonably chilly for mid-September, and the scent of pine and damp earth washed over everything like a balm.

These quiet moments outside, listening to his pack scuffling in the tall grass, did more for his anxiety than any therapy or self-medication ever had in the past. He’d tried it all over the years, from Xanax and cognitive behavioral therapy to whisky and sleeping pills. Nothing ever succeeded in doing more than dulling his senses and worsening the disorientation of waking from his nightmares. Every psychiatrist he saw was convinced that they would be the one to fix him, to discover a cure, but he only left those sessions feeling foggy and hollow and lost, like they’d scooped out the contents of his skull to spread across the pages of their academic journals.

Will was done with it all. He’d do his work, save lives, and come back here to his dogs and his little house, a beacon of safety in the middle of a flat sea of wilderness. This would be his therapy.

A wet nose pushed into the back of his hand, and Will’s eyes fluttered open to glance down at the brindle-furred dog panting at his side.

“Hi, Winston.” He crouched down to scratch the animal around his neck, accepting an enthusiastic lick to his cheek with a chuckle and a grin. He was glad the new addition to his

little pack of strays was fitting in so well. Someone must have trained Winston before, because he was incredibly well-behaved and attentive. He wondered how in the world such a friendly, intelligent dog ended up wandering down the highway, filthy and frightened, and briefly considered if he should be searching for his previous owners. But something must have happened for him to end up in such a state, and Will was frankly too selfish to give up the dog once they had already bonded.

"You'll be staying with me, won't you boy? That's right." He stroked down Winston's sides with both hands, generous with his scritches as the dog sat down in the overgrown field and continued to pant happily. "Yeah. You like it here, don't you? Me, too."

He let the pack run around for another twenty minutes, throwing sticks to make sure they tired themselves out. He would've liked to take them into the woods, but the sun was sinking low behind the horizon and painting the sky a bloody red, and it wouldn't be wise to walk through the trees in the dark. Will wasn't worried about getting lost, but some of his dogs (Buster, in particular) were prone to wandering off if he didn't keep his eyes on them. And something in the back of his mind did worry about what he might see, out in the woods with nothing but the rising moon to light their way.

He whistled to call the pack back into the house and counted them as they bounded up the porch steps and through the open door, all eagerly gathering in the kitchen for their dinner. He fed them first, portioning out food into the steel bowls that lined the floor and refreshing their water.

Will's own dinner consisted of a microwave lasagna that was left half-eaten and forgotten while he graded papers at his desk. He got through about a third of them before he was distracted by the flicker of something outside his window.

He blinked sleep from his eyes and pushed his chair back, standing to flick the curtain aside and peer out into the dark. He couldn't see much beyond the porch, but everything looked quiet and still. Somewhere in the distance, an animal screeched. It was a tremulous sound, high and shrill, and he couldn't tell if it was a cry of pain or exaltation in the victory of a hunt.

He was leaning back from the window, letting the thin curtain fall back into place, when he heard the unmistakable creak of a floorboard outside the front door.

He ducked back, feeling his pulse jump beneath the skin, and padded silently to his closet to remove his rifle and load two rounds into the barrel. Careful not to rouse the dogs that lay together in front of the fireplace, he moved back to the door and quickly slipped his feet into his boots. He held his breath and listened for other sounds of movement outside, but heard nothing. Carefully, rifle raised and braced on his left forearm as he turned the knob, he pulled the door open and slipped outside, quickly scanning the area for any sign of life or disturbance.

Seeing nothing, he crept down the porch steps and into the bare stretch of yard before the field. He swept his gaze from left to right and back again, slowly advancing forward. The grass crunched beneath his feet, brittle with frost, and his breath misted white each time he exhaled. The snap of a twig had him whirling around, rifle raised and aim shaky.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs stood just behind him, skin pale and clammy, eyes clouded over with death. Will stumbled backwards, nearly tripping over the uneven ground as he scrambled to put some distance between them.

“See?” Hobbs asked, lips wet and red with blood.

Will swallowed, and his mouth felt too dry to speak. “See what?”

Hobbs gestured downwards to the girl that lay at his feet, gasping and choking on the blood that bubbled and leaked from her neck and mouth, drowning her.

Will dropped his gun and rushed forward, falling to his knees to press his hands to her slit throat. He tried to hold her gaping wound closed, tried to keep her blood inside, but they were both shaking and she kept making these pitiful noises, wet gasps and gurgles. Soon his palms were slick and dark and she went very still, the light fading from her pale blue eyes.

Garrett crouched down across from him, mouth twisted in a light smirk.

“See?”

He looked down again, saw the wide red smile that opened beneath her chin. He saw that her mouth and neck were stained and ruined, but her eyes and hair remained the same, unblemished and beautiful. She lay so still. So very still. She would never move again. Never leave him.

A log cracked and shifted in the fire, and Will blinked down at the paper spread before him. He still held the red pen in his hand, and he’d underlined and circled the word “see” several times. It lay in the middle of an irrelevant sentence. He sighed deeply and lifted his wrist to check the time, frowning at the watch face when he found that he’d been sitting and staring into space for nearly an hour and a half.

He capped the pen and left the paper as it was, pushing back from the desk to stand and stretch his stiff back, grunting at the dull pain. Winston raised his head and watched Will shuffle past to dig his bottle of aspirin out of his coat pocket. He dry swallowed two pills and stripped down to his boxers before climbing into bed, setting his alarm on his phone and trying to find a comfortable position on the lumpy mattress.

Sleep didn’t come easily even though his bones seemed to ache with exhaustion, and he pretended not to notice when two of the dogs hopped up to lay at the foot of the bed. At least they might wake him if he accidentally kicked one of them in the midst of a nightmare.

As he drifted off some time later, he found himself wondering how many more quiet, solitary days he would have alone in his own home.

This One Thinks I'm a Slaughterhouse

Chapter Notes

Hi there, lovelies.

I've been excited and productive, so this got done sooner than I expected! Hopefully I can keep the ball rolling with updates. We'll see.

Please enjoy. xx

Chapter Title:
Romance - Ex:Re

Will was not at all surprised when Jack Crawford called him in to his office three days after their disagreement in the restroom. He had expected it to happen sooner, in fact, but that didn't stop him from feeling like his stomach was trying to sink out of his body as he made his way down the hallway, briefcase slung over one shoulder.

He was used to a fair amount of social anxiety in any situation that required him to speak to people, especially strangers, but this was more acute than usual. He chalked it up to the fact that this bodyguard waiting in Jack's office would, in all likelihood, be intruding on every aspect of Will's life for the foreseeable future. He couldn't remember a time that he'd dreaded anything more than this. Maybe it was similar to the dread he felt before entering a fresh crime scene, but at least there he knew what to expect behind the sheet plastic and police tape. This was a fresh new horror for him to experience, with no feasible escape in sight.

He hesitated outside of Jack's door for as long as he could manage without feeling like a creep, then raised his reluctant fist to knock.

"Come in." Jack's voice rang out immediately, as if he'd been waiting. He probably had.

Will smothered a sigh and twisted the doorknob in his sweaty palm, letting himself into the room. His eyes flickered over Jack, seated behind his desk as usual, before landing on the man sitting closer to the door, his body shifted slightly in his chair so he could look over his shoulder at Will as he entered.

He had expected a fairly typical specimen of the protective services; someone who clearly kept themselves in peak physical condition, with a bland and no-nonsense look. Perhaps a distinct air of ex-military, a suspicious awareness with rough edges and neutral affect. This man was… Not that.

He was impeccably styled, ash brown hair slicked back away from his angular face. He sat with one leg crossed over the other, suit jacket unbuttoned and hands folded neatly over one knee, his clothing unexpectedly ostentatious. He wore a veneer that was calm, collected, and politely interested, projecting just enough eccentricity to come off as mysterious and somewhat *other*. It was a clearly constructed front, intentional, but genuine enough that it wasn't immediately apparent what might dwell under such carefully crafted presentation.

Will felt momentarily off put by the glassy surface he encountered when looking at him, his vision obscured by a veil that did not exist to shield most others from his second sight. Irritated with himself, but unable to stem the itch of curiosity, Will allowed his eyes to flicker upwards, meeting the man's gaze for half a moment.

It was cool and dark, distinctly free of the usual mess of untamed emotions and desires that tended to overwhelm Will when he engaged in eye contact. There was something almost like detached curiosity in the maroon of his irises, but Will looked away again before he could latch on to anything concrete. The brief encounter left him both unsettled and strangely comfitted.

"Sit down, Will." Jack gestured to the chair on the far side of his desk and waited. Will shut the door behind himself and shuffled awkwardly around the bodyguard's seat before reaching his own and falling into it with as much grace as he could manage. "This is Hannibal Lecter, the protection detail we're considering hiring for you. Mr. Lecter, this is Special Investigator Will Graham."

"Dr. Lecter." The unusual man corrected Jack before turning his attentions to Will. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Will nodded vaguely in his direction, refusing to look his way again despite his own flickering confusion and the steady gaze he could feel like a weight against his skin. He couldn't place the man's accent, and he wasn't sure how he felt about the shape of his words and how they curled like fingers at the back of his neck.

"You're a doctor, as well?" Jack asked, clearly trying to sound polite despite the blatant incredulity in his tone.

Dr. Lecter seemed to take it in stride, nodding in Will's periphery as he adjusted the crease on one of his pant legs. "I worked as a surgeon for several years before deciding to commit my energies to private security."

It was certainly a strange choice in career moves, but Jack and Will's bewilderment didn't seem to phase him. After a moment of suspended silence, Jack cleared his throat. "I see. Well, I suppose that must come in handy in this line of work, hm?"

"On occasion, yes."

Another uncomfortable beat of quiet hung in the air, each of them seeming to wait for someone else to speak. Dr. Lecter was the only one who remained unaffected, sitting still and calm while the other two men shifted in their seats. Jack, ever the steadfast leader, soon put them out of their misery.

“Good to hear that. Good to hear. Well, I suppose you should take a look at the threats we’ve received so far.” He tapped two fingers against a file folder laying closed atop the surface of his desk. “Maybe it’ll give you a sense of the type of danger Will is in.”

Will scoffed in the back of his throat, teeth bared in a bitter grimace of a smile as he rolled his eyes towards the ceiling. “I’ve told you, Jack. I’m not in any serious type of danger.”

“There have been three so far.” Jack ignored him completely, plucking up the file folder and holding it out to Dr. Lecter. “The first was sent three months ago. The second a month after that, though it got lost in processing for a while.” He still sounded disgruntled about the oversight. “And the third we received just last week.”

Dr. Lecter reached out to take the file, and Will noticed that his nails were perfectly rounded with a healthy shine.

A bodyguard with a fucking manicure.

He thumbed the file open in his lap and began to look through the photocopied notes. “Why don’t you think you are in danger, Will?”

Will planted his elbow on the arm of his chair and rubbed one hand over his mouth, muffling his sigh. “This guy wants attention.” He stated confidently, eyes fixed on the crooked line of Jack’s tie. “He’s calling out in riddles, hoping to provoke a response. He wants me to look for him. He wants me curious. He doesn’t want me dead.”

Yet.

“You shall know me by the fiery breath that cracks and blackens your skin, by the magnificent jaws that rend and tear the muscles from your bones.”

Will’s head jerked towards the doctor, gaze drawn automatically to the mouth that formed the words.

“You shall look upon the terrible radiance of my visage and be transformed. You shall look upon me with mirror eyes and show me shattered visions of a great, glittering beast. The beast will feast upon your eyes and your tongue, and your blood will run thick in red rivers to fuel my imminent becoming. You shall look upon me in death and you shall see.”

He read the most recent note slowly, almost reverently, and something about hearing the words in that voice of his, curling dark and resonant like smoke, sent a chill down Will’s spine. It wasn’t an altogether unpleasant sensation.

See. You shall see.

See.

He found himself staring, entranced, and hardly noticed it when Dr. Lecter lifted his chin and met his gaze, a subtle smile playing at the edge of his lips.

“It certainly sounds like someone wants you dead.”

Will blinked, tearing himself away with some effort, and shook his head with a short jerk. “FBI agents get death threats all the time. People want attention. Media. Or they’re crazies who drown themselves in delusions that will never touch reality.” He could tell that the man who wrote these letters fit in neither category, but he wasn’t willing to admit that to Jack.

“But these are personalized.” Jack was going to argue anyway, gesturing emphatically towards the papers Dr. Lecter was still examining. “*Mirror eyes*, Will. He knows what you do. Knows you look at crime scenes, look for people like him.”

Will gritted his teeth in frustration, hands curling into fists where they lay against his thighs. “Everyone knows what I do since Freddie Lounds splashed my name across the internet.” He spat the name out in disgust, his blood nearly boiling just to think of the vile woman.

“These threats were coming before that. Months before. He’s been watching you for a while.” Jack reached out to accept the folder back from the doctor, nodding in acceptance. “How soon can you start, Dr. Lecter?”

Will found himself surging forward to the edge of his chair, barely restraining himself from leaping to his feet in outrage. “No, Jack. I don’t want a security detail. I don’t *need* one.”

Jack’s eyes flashed, jaw clenching as he fought to reign in his temper. He always was aware when he had an audience to keep up appearances for. “You’re not hiring him, Graham. The bureau will be contracting his services. And they don’t come cheap.”

He said it like a warning. Like Will should be *thankful*. He wasn’t thankful. He was fucking upset.

“No. No, I’m sorry, but no.” He stood, fumbling to grab for his briefcase, though he didn’t move from beside the chair once he had it over his arm. He turned and gestured wildly towards Hannibal Lecter, still sitting relaxed with his hands clasped over one knee like he was royalty of some sort. “He doesn’t even *look* like a bodyguard.”

He knew he was lashing out, could see the lines of outrage deepening around Jack’s downturned mouth, but he couldn’t stop himself. “Frankly, he’s closer to your age than mine, and that suit looks more appropriate for some pretentious art gallery than a knife fight.”

“That’s enough.” Jack raised his voice to a shout, the volume bouncing off the walls and making Will wince. “I’m told he’s the best. We’re hiring him.”

His tone was final, the argument settled. Will swallowed against the bitter flood of poison on the back of his tongue, his skin vibrating with a hot, righteous fury. Before he could do something about it, like storm out, Dr. Lecter’s voice broke the tense silence, cool as the placid surface of a lake.

“I dressed for an interview, not a knife fight. But I assure you, if violence broke out at any moment, I would not be hindered from performing my role to the best of my abilities.”

Will glanced in the doctor’s direction, allowing himself to take a second look at the ridiculous three-piece suit he wore. It was a glaring clash of color and pattern, overwhelming when one

looked closely, though perhaps it managed to work somehow if viewed from afar. Really, who the hell combined plaid and paisley? Hannibal Lecter must be a very strange man. Will would have expected him to be angered or offended by his rude outburst, but Dr. Lecter's mouth was pursed with amusement, not annoyance.

It was nearly enough to make Will feel ashamed of his behavior. But only nearly.

"I have a lecture to teach." He muttered to the room, striding towards the door and out into the hallway without another word. He was aware that he was being childish, sullen and resentful. But he felt it was justified, under the circumstances.

Jack was forcing his hand and Will hated to be trapped.

This was going to be a disaster.

Hannibal was intrigued.

He made it a point never to take jobs that did not hold some personal interest for him, one way or another. He was a generally content creature, and could find interest and beauty in nearly anything, but he would not tolerate mundanity and boredom. As such, and because he could certainly afford to be picky, he only accepted bids from clientele that promised him entertainment or mental stimulation.

When the Federal Bureau of Investigation, of all organizations, contacted him to protect one of their own profilers from death threats of an unknown origin, Hannibal simply couldn't turn down the opportunity for such delicious indulgence.

Jack Crawford was a name he knew well, though Will Graham was less familiar to him. He was positively tickled to speak to the head of the Behavioral Analysis Unit over the phone, a man whom he had followed for years, tracking his movements through media coverage of investigations into the Ripper's work. He had accepted the interview eagerly, waiting only a few hours to confirm his willingness to meet (and even that had required a measure of restraint).

Of course he engaged in the necessary research beforehand, running Will Graham's name through his usual avenues of investigation, though he assumed the main interest of this endeavor would lie with the opportunity to observe and taunt Jack Crawford from a new vantage point.

How very wrong he was.

Will Graham was a fascinating man in his own right, and more closely involved in the hunt for the Chesapeake Ripper than Hannibal had initially been aware of. He had run across the name before, but had paid no more attention to it than he had to the names Beverly Katz, Jimmy Price or Brian Zeller. But Graham was not just another pawn on the chess board. No. He was a Queen, slicing through the enemy's defenses with undeniable power and a savage beauty born of righteous violence.

Freddie Lounds recently wrote a delightful exposé about him. ***Takes One to Catch One: The Man Behind the Shrike Massacre.***

Her take on cannibalism was crass and rudely blasé, but he had come to expect nothing less from her. She made up for it by writing a wonderfully in-depth analysis of Will Graham's psyche and hypotheses about the origin of his fascinating gift.

A man who could think like a killer. Any killer. All of them. A man who could empathize so deeply with the minds of murderers, he practically became them. Did, in fact, when he shot Garret Jacob Hobbs fifteen times, emptying his service weapon in a spectacular display of unnecessary force. And yet, as Ms. Lounds unapologetically claimed despite no concrete evidence, the FBI's pet serial killer hunter faced no disciplinary consequences. None that were made public, in any case. She went on to detail an incident from Will Graham's police days in New Orleans that she cited as evidence of instability, and pointed out the fact that Graham had never been cleared to work as a full special agent. The screening process was too strict, specifically when it came to mental health.

Hannibal did a bit of further digging and found no less than four psychiatric papers written about Graham and his unique "empathy disorder." Three of them were gracious enough to identify him only as *WG*, though it wasn't a particular mystery who they were referring to, but the fourth didn't even bother to exclude his full name and professional title. They were illuminating to an extent, regardless of the validity of the authors' misguided claims. Any of these golden nuggets of information would have caught Hannibal's attention, but all together they were entirely too much to write off as coincidence or curiosity.

No. Will Graham was special. And Hannibal was quite looking forward to digging around inside the bone arena of his skull until he could spread the contents of his red, glistening mind across a background of understanding and see just what made him tick.

The much-anticipated meeting did not go quite how Hannibal had expected it to, but he was not disappointed with the outcome. Crawford was turning out to be laughably easy to read, fitting comfortably into a typical "alpha male" personality type. Domineering, aggressive but not overly so when it was socially unacceptable, morally self-righteous, and driven towards the pursuit of success, almost certainly to a fault.

He would be entirely boring, if not for his unique position in the elaborate game of cat and mouse that Hannibal was playing.

Will Graham, now he was… Something else entirely.

He was a rude one, but Hannibal could tell from his demeanor that his churlishness was driven by anxiety and distress rather than a natural inclination towards discourtesy. Rude was rude, but there was something about Graham's scathing retorts and pathological avoidance of eye contact that held its own strange charm. Perhaps charm was too strong a word for it, but there was something magnetic attracting Hannibal's attention, like a puzzle that he itched to dismantle.

And he was a puzzle, that was immediately clear. He wore emotions like a suit of armor, projecting and reflecting a cacophony of sensation with no indication of what was truly

churning beneath the surface. It was a perfect negative of Hannibal's own mask, but nearly as effective to hide behind. He couldn't get a read on the man, other than the blatantly obvious frustration and resentment that he radiated with every twitch of his mouth and tap of restless fingers.

The Special Investigator wrapped scruffiness around himself like a second protective skin, dressing in worn flannel tucked into khakis that were frayed at the cuffs even though he was supposedly on his way to teach a *lecture* (Hannibal inwardly cringed in disgust at the tackiness of it). He hid behind wire-framed glasses that he probably didn't need, and all Hannibal could smell on him, though he didn't get close enough for a full scent, was burnt coffee and cheap soap and the faint must of dog.

Despite all of that, he was not unattractive. The bone structure of his face was classical and promising, and the brief glimpses Hannibal had caught of his eyes revealed striking blue irises that were quite pleasing with the rest of his coloring; pale skin and dark hair. A well-cut suit, hair conditioner and a trimmed beard would do wonders for his appearance.

He found it more than a little amusing how easily Will allowed himself to be bullied into Crawford's desired results, and was only further entertained by his ridiculous outburst regarding Hannibal's suitability as a bodyguard. If Will were not such a fascinating specimen, and if he was not clearly making a fuss as a token rebellion against his boss's tyranny, he would have found the insults to be unforgivably impolite. As it was, he was willing to let it pass in favor of allowing Will's opinions to be proven wrong in time.

He was already anticipating the delights of watching and planning and nudging each player across the board until the game was arranged just how he wanted it to be. He nearly forgot that he wasn't done dealing with Crawford after Graham left the room in a huff, gaze trained thoughtfully on the door where his new charge had disappeared.

"Sorry about him." Jack sounded intentionally put-upon, attempting to garner sympathy for having to deal with an unreasonable, disgruntled employee. "He's just set in his ways. Doesn't like the idea of having someone follow him home every day. But don't worry, he'll come around."

Hannibal pasted a pleasant smile across his face and turned back to Crawford. "I'm not worried."

Jack blinked at him, but didn't seem willing to question the good fortune Hannibal's agreeableness. "Good, then. Good. How soon can you start?"

He had prepared for this, perhaps overoptimistic in his arrangements for a compressed timeline, but it looked like that was going to pay off.

"I could start now."

"Right now?" Jack repeated in surprise, eyes flickering down to Hannibal's attire.

His smile only widened. "Yes. I have supplies and amenities in my car."

“You came prepared. I like that.” Jack nodded in approval, leaning back in his chair with a soft creak of springs. “So you’ll start now. That sounds fine.”

“Very well. Then there’s just the matter of my conditions.”

Jack’s brow furrowed in confusion, and Hannibal silently delighted in how clueless he appeared. “Conditions?”

“Yes, my working conditions.” He gracefully uncrossed his legs and bent slightly to reach his briefcase beside the chair, easily pulling out a manila folder containing the contract he’d drawn up the previous night and handing it over the desk to Crawford. The man began to look through it with a slightly constipated expression as Hannibal went over the highlights verbally.

“I don’t require time off in extreme cases such as these, but since we had previously discussed Will being safest while sequestered away in Quantico, I propose that I be allowed to return to my home in Baltimore while Will is at work here.” This would allow him enough freedom of movement to accomplish his goals and deal with obstacles as he saw fit, all under the guise of catching a few hours of sleep at his own house. “Otherwise, it is necessary that I accompany him everywhere.” He allowed that to sit for a moment before he clarified what Jack would have already gathered. “That would include tagging along for any FBI work that takes him outside of this campus.”

Jack grimaced, clearly ready to protest. “Is that really necessary? He’ll be surrounded by agents.”

“He was not surrounded by agents during his deadly encounter with the Minnesota Shrike.” Hannibal pointed out, watching Jack flinch with some satisfaction. “And besides.” He crossed one leg over the other again, settling with his hands folded comfortably in his lap. “That would be the easiest way for a killer to set a trap for Mr. Graham. Stage a crime scene and wait for the perfect opportunity to capture, harm, or kill him when he comes to gaze upon the body.”

It’s what Hannibal might do, if he were prone to risky and impulsive decisions.

Crawford frowned, but didn’t take long to acquiesce with a short nod of acceptance. “You’ll have to sign an NDA.”

“Of course.” It was a testament to Hannibal’s cultivated self-control that he didn’t let a single flicker of glee cross his face.

“Then I see no problem with you going where Will goes.”

“Wonderful. Then there is just the matter of nullifying any legal culpability on my part.” He’d added this section in, since it was his first time dealing directly with the government (and a law enforcement agency at that). “Should Mr. Graham come into danger, I’ll need clearance to neutralize the threat by whatever means necessary, receiving no legal backlash for such justified actions.”

It shouldn't be a problem. Private security firms signed similar liability agreements, protecting themselves from legal recourse should any agent with malicious intent suffer hospitalization or death.

Jack's forehead was creased in thought as he scanned through the contract, but he was nodding slowly in agreement. "I'll need to have one of our lawyers look this over, but I think we can have it signed by the end of the day."

Hannibal allowed himself a semi-genuine smile. "Perfect. Please notify me when I can stop by to complete the paperwork and pick up my copy of the documentation."

"I'll do that." Jack set the papers down and glanced at the clock. "In the meantime, Will's class ends in sixty-five minutes. You're welcome to wait in the cafeteria downstairs, if you'd like."

"Thank you." Hannibal stood, buttoning his jacket and smoothing out the creases with one hand before bending to pick up his briefcase.

"No problem at all, Dr. Lecter." Jack stood as well, extending his hand to be shaken in the traditional American manner of concluding business. "It'll be a pleasure to, ah, work with you."

Hannibal inclined his head pleasantly and shook the man's too warm hand. "Likewise."

He left the office in a fabulous mood, all things considered, and spent a few minutes exploring the floor, happily given free reign by the guest badge pinned to his breast pocket. Once he had memorized the layout, he opted to seek out Will Graham's classroom instead of enduring what would undoubtedly be a terrible cup of coffee in the cafeteria.

He found it easily and silently entered through the swinging doors, lingering in the shadowed entryway out of site of the tiered student seating lining three sides of the room. He kept his expression neutrally interested in case Will caught a glimpse of him (though that seemed unlikely given the way he was steadfastly staring at his slides and the edges of the ceiling, avoiding the students altogether), but his eyes glinted with undeniable fascination as he watched and listened to what sounded like a very insightful lecture on sexual sadism.

Oh. This was going to be so much fun.

Are We Breathing? Are We Wasting Our Breath?

Chapter Notes

This is a slow burn. Definitely a slow burn. But things will start picking up pretty soon ;)

I love to watch the infatuation grow between these two, devotion and obsession springing up in the fertile ground of their relationship.

Please enjoy.

Chapter Title:
Crowd Surf Off a Cliff - Emily Haines

Will had hoped for another day of reprieve from this nightmare of a situation, but he could spot Dr. Hannibal Lecter lingering near the door of his classroom as he turned off the slide projector and began to pack away his things.

The man looked more imposing standing up, taller and more solid than he had first appeared. He cut a striking figure, contrasted against the steady stream of fleeing students in his maroon suit, like a streak of blood against the darkness. Will still couldn't believe that someone could combine a plaid suit with a paisley printed tie and get away without looking like a goddamn clown, but here they were.

"Dr. Lecter." He greeted as the last of his students trickled out and left the two of them alone. Hannibal approached the lectern with unhurried steps, each one ringing softly out into the muffled silence. For one disorienting moment, Will experienced a surge of déjà vu, Alana and Hannibal blurring together, the concerned tension of that visit bleeding through space and time to contaminate the air here.

"Hello, Will."

In an instant it was gone, smothering sensations trickling away into memory as sharp cheek bones and the curve of thin lips were blinked into focus. He watched his new bodyguard tuck his hands into his pockets and settle into a relaxed stance, radiating practiced casualness.

"I believe we may have gotten off on the wrong foot, as they say."

Will stifled his snort of disbelief to a short huff of air. "Is that what they say?"

Hannibal hummed in acknowledgement, sauntering even closer as Will stuffed papers into his bag. “It is not my intention to put you out. I will endeavor to perform my job with as little disturbance to your life as possible.”

As much as he tried to maintain a prickly defensive barrier between himself and everyone else, Will’s sense of fairness was frankly overdeveloped. It made his stomach ache, to think of the tastelessly rude way he was treating a man who was only doing what he was hired to do. It was made all the worse by how courteous Hannibal was being despite Will’s vindictive behavior. He sighed, reaching up with one hand to rub briefly at his eyes.

“I’m sorry. Thanks. I’ve, uh… Not been handling this as well as I could.”

“I can’t blame you.” Hannibal assured him, a hint of a smile in his words. “Agent Crawford is a… difficult man, is he not?”

Will let out a startled bark of laughter, caught unawares by the blunt evaluation. “You could say that, yeah.”

He let his eyes flicker up enough to take in the expression on Dr. Lecter’s face, finding an unexpected sort of fondness in the smile he was wearing. It made Will blink, his stomach squirming again with familiar anxiety, and he slung his bag of his shoulder in preparation to leave.

“So, are you, uh, following me home? Or will I be escaping surveillance for another night?” He strode past Hannibal and out into the hallway, the taller man falling easily into step beside him.

“I shall follow you home, if you’re leaving now.”

“That’s the plan.” Will glanced in his direction, taking in the expensive leather briefcase the doctor was carrying. “Do you need to, um, pick up a bag from somewhere, or…?”

He had assumed the bodyguard would insist on staying with him overnight. It was definitely going to be the most unpleasant part of the whole setup, but Will didn’t see himself getting out of it. Not if this guy was as ‘highly recommended’ as Jack kept insisting. Regardless, he didn’t seem like the type to be easily convinced or tricked into giving Will more wiggle room.

“I have the necessary items packed in my car.” Hannibal assured him, and Will nodded.

“Okay. Good.”

They walked the rest of the way to the parking lot in silence, thankfully free of any overpowering awkwardness. Dr. Lecter seemed the sort of man to fit comfortably into almost any situation.

Will turned to him when they reached his car, fumbling in one pocket for his keys. “I live in Wolf Trap; it’s about an hour drive. You can just follow me or - ”

“I have your address.” Hannibal informed him. Because of course he did. “But I will endeavor not to lose you in the traffic.”

Will nodded, turning to unlock the driver’s side door.

“Just a moment, please.” A hand reached out, catching his arm in a firm grip before he could insert the key, and Will’s eyes flashed up in surprise. Their gazes caught, and Will was once again struck by the incredible placid absence of emotion in those chestnut eyes. There was just a clean, clear purposefulness, not at all overwhelming, and Will wondered if this was how everyone else felt when they looked at each other all the time.

It took a moment for Hannibal to release his arm, and he gestured for Will to step away from the car. He did so, brow creasing in dazed confusion as he watched Hannibal quickly walk around the perimeter of the car, then bend to inspect the wheel wells and peer underneath the belly of the dated Volvo.

He let out a bitter scoff and rolled his eyes towards the sky when he realized just what the man was doing. “This guy isn’t going to plant a bomb in my car. That’s not his style.”

Guns, maybe. Knives, certainly. But not a bomb. And not in his car. It was far too impersonal.

“Perhaps not.” Hannibal conceded, his tone suggesting that was something he already knew. “But it is better to be careful than to be dead, Will.”

He shot the profiler an amused smirk as he smoothly took the keys from Will’s hand and unlocked the car for him. He reached inside the door and popped the hood, circling around to lift it up and briefly inspect the engine to make sure nothing had been tampered with.

“Am I good to go?” Will asked dryly, amused and annoyed in equal parts. “Maybe you should check that no one slashed the brake lines.”

Hannibal let the hood drop shut with a sharp metallic sound and nodded in mock seriousness. “Your brakes are fine. I am optimistic that you will make it home alive.”

Despite himself, Will felt the corners of his mouth tugging into a smile. “Thanks. Clearly I’d be dead without you.”

“Clearly.” Hannibal watched, hands tucked into the pockets of his suit pants again, until Will had climbed into his car and buckled his seatbelt. He started the reliable Volvo and put it into reverse, waiting a moment to pull out while Hannibal walked to his vehicle a few spaces away. Will sighed to himself, shaking his head in amusement at the sight of the sleek black Bentley the doctor folded himself into.

“Fucking rich weirdo.” Will muttered to himself as backed out of his parking spot and peeled away towards the road.

His new bodyguard certainly was an enigma. It didn’t take an empathy disorder to see that he could be doing almost anything else, and he obviously didn’t need the money (though he was

no doubt being paid a flinch-worthy sum for this). No, Hannibal Lecter *chose* to put his life on the line to protect others. And Will was positive that it wasn't out of a desire to serve and protect his fellow man. Despite the doctor's strangely unreadable demeanor, he could see enough in the constructed persona and glint of dark eyes to know that Hannibal's primary drive was not altruistic.

There was something he got out of this. Something that… Interested him.

Will sighed heavily and fished in his jacket pocket for his aspirin, gripping the steering wheel one-handed. He should really back off the psychoanalyzing, especially since he was going to be sharing space with this guy for the foreseeable future. Once he saw too much of someone, it became uncomfortable to spend any stretch of time alone together. And besides, it was just making his headache worse. He glanced in his rearview mirror and sighed again at the sight of the luxury car following at a respectable distance behind his.

He supposed it could be worse. At least he wasn't dealing with some amped up alpha type who would insist on driving him everywhere and controlling every move he made under the guise of ensuring his safety while really just indulging in a testosterone-fueled power trip.

Hannibal had decided to urge Will to allow him to act as the profiler's chauffer for the duration of his contract. He thought that it was reasonable under the high-risk circumstances of the case, and besides. He would enjoy the extra time in close proximity to make conversation and observe the man when he could not make quick escapes. And he could tell that Will might be more likely to speak openly in a situation where Hannibal's gaze was naturally directed elsewhere.

They would use the Bentley, of course. It was much more comfortable, and Hannibal would need his own vehicle when he traveled home during Will's work hours. He could predict some resistance on Will's part, but there were many persuasive arguments in favor of his suggestion and Hannibal was confident in his abilities to convince his charge that carpooling was the best course of action.

He spent the rest of the car ride planning out how the conversation would unfold and reflecting on what other boundaries he could push and liberties he could take. He wasn't entirely sure yet how Will Graham would react in any given situation, and the uncertainty was scintillating. He would have to think on his feet for this one. Thankfully, he was already quite excellent at that.

They eventually pulled off the highway and onto a two-lane country road, which they took another fifteen miles away from civilization before turning onto an even smaller road. It was one lane, now, allowing for no recourse should they encounter a driver coming from the opposite direction. Hannibal inferred that they must already be approaching, or on, Will's private property.

It didn't look like much. Untended fields of wild bluestem grass and milkweed, large swaths of forest in the near distance. Even when the little farmhouse came into view, he was not particularly taken with the place. Hannibal had not surrounded himself in so much nature since his early childhood. There had been the rolling hills of the Italian countryside, golden

and warm, and the lush green and blue of the Parisian coastline, but nothing quite like this. He hadn't experienced the dark, untamed reach of the unapologetic earth in years. The air held a sharpness here, as if the landscape itself was breathing realness under the oppressive grey of the evening sky.

It was dissimilar enough from the forests of Lithuania that Hannibal did not feel the urge to snap and bite against its cold grip, but it did not precisely welcome his sensibilities. He supposed it suited Will, though, very well. The defensive man could build himself a fortress here, the fields acting as a moat around his humble castle. Warm and alone amid the wilderness.

He peered curiously around the land as he followed Will's shabby Volvo into the long driveway. There was one other structure on the property, perhaps a quarter mile away – something between a barn and a shed. He wondered what was kept there.

He cut the engine once he had rolled to a stop behind Will, silently lamenting the future state of his tires from driving over dirt and mud on a daily basis. It was a small price to pay to wriggle his way into such a delightful position, and certainly worth the investment of more regular trips to the dealership for detailing.

He climbed out of the Bentley, just a few seconds behind Will, and didn't bother to lock up behind himself. He doubted anyone would even be close enough to break into his car, and he would come back later to retrieve his things. First, he would see what lay inside.

He was climbing the porch steps when Will unlocked the door and swung it inwards, letting loose a veritable sea of canines. They flowed out around him, multicolored pelts and lolling tongues, and streamed out into the yard, a couple of them letting out shrill barks of excitement.

Hannibal's eyes widened slightly in surprise and he faltered on the wooden steps, caught off guard in spite of himself. He had expected one, perhaps two dogs, considering the house was so small, and he had never fathomed the possibility of any one human owning such an unreasonable number of pets. Cats, perhaps, as they were largely independent, but not dogs.

He resisted the urge to curl his lip in distaste as no less than three of them lingered around his legs, pressing their wet noses curiously to his ironed pant legs and getting fur all over the dark colored wool.

Will let out a sharp whistle and gestured towards the yard, sending the remaining animals bounding off after their pack and leaving Hannibal unmolested.

"Sorry." Will said with a disappointed twist of his mouth, clearly having read Hannibal's discomfort. He silently chastised himself for being so transparent, regardless of Will's heightened ability to read people. "They're just interested because you're new. I don't get many visitors."

"It's quite alright." Hannibal assured him, stepping onto the porch and smiling reassuringly. "I was simply caught off-guard by the sheer number of them."

He watched with quiet fascination as Will's pale cheeks colored a light dust of rose. "There's only seven." He clarified somewhat defensively, holding the porch door for Hannibal to follow him inside. "I pick up strays."

Hannibal hummed in acknowledgement, filing that away for later analysis and turning his attention to the inside of the house.

It was cozy, filled with mismatched furniture, but not cluttered. Although he could tell there was a second story, the bed sat in the middle of the room, a rumpled set of blankets pulled up to the navy-blue pillowcases. Everything seemed to have a worn sheen to it, the cushion on an armchair near the window almost threadbare and the bedside table scuffed around the edges, but nothing was shabby, per say. There was care here, if not pride. Bookcases lined the walls and Hannibal peered curiously at some of the titles, taking in the eclectic mix of forensic texts and classical literature. His attention turned next to the desk in front of the windows, finding his interest piqued when he could not immediately identify the various tools and materials set up there. After a moment, he recognized the shape of a fish hook held in a clamp beneath a magnifying glass.

The recognizable scrape of a cabinet door opening had Hannibal turning on his heel, looking across the open-concept floor to the small kitchen on the back side of the house. It was quite poor by Hannibal's standards, the old stove discolored with use and the counter space cramped. At least he had gas burners and an oven, a small table set up with two matching chairs so there was a space to eat. The cabinetry was painted an uncharacteristic powder blue and there was an alarming amount of flower-patterned linoleum, leading him to conclude that Will had done nothing to the kitchen since he moved in. A shame, to be sure, but Hannibal had survived in worse conditions.

He crossed slowly towards Will, who appeared to be laying out steel bowls on the countertop.

"There's a second floor and a work shed across the back field." Will told him, voice tight and a nervous tension in his shoulders. "The tree line is half a mile off and there's only the one road in. Good sight lines."

Hannibal watched him pull a large Tupperware container from the fridge, propping it against the counter and cracking it open to begin shoveling spoonfuls of the mashed substance into the waiting bowls. Hannibal's nose crinkled slightly at the strong scent of brown rice, pumpkin, and ground chicken.

"That's very convenient." He watched Will's face, trying to catch his eyes again, but the profiler was clearly avoiding looking at him. Hannibal would find it rude if it wasn't so clearly a defense mechanism. He was rushed and a bit shaky in his preparations of the dog food, obviously uncomfortable with the presence of someone new in his home and not handling it very well. Hannibal supposed it was to be expected that he clam up upon the intrusion of someone unknown into his personal safe space.

In an attempt to put his charge at ease, despite his disappointment in the necessity of such actions, he retreated out of the close quarters of the kitchen and went to explore the narrow hallway to his left. He discovered a small bathroom, most likely the only one in the house, and the staircase to the second story. Tucked behind the staircase was a narrow door. When

Hannibal tried the knob, he found it locked. His palm withdrew covered in a thin layer of dust, which he wiped unhappily on his pant leg. He'd be dry cleaning the trousers anyhow, since they would undoubtedly end up covered in dog hair after this evening.

"Would you mind if I took a look upstairs?" He called back to Will, forcing himself to ask before taking free range of the house.

"No, go ahead." Will replied over the clink of steel against cheap tile flooring.

Hannibal decided that would suffice, since he evidently wasn't going to be given a proper tour. He climbed the stairs, noting the subtle creak of the third and seventh beneath his weight, and found the second-floor landing to be dim and faintly musty. The air smelled of disuse, and he clasped his hands behind the small of his back before moving through the cramped hall into the first of only two rooms.

There was another bed here, smaller than Will's own, a wooden bureau and a single chair. There were no possessions in the room except for a box of clothes tucked behind the door, but he noted that the bed had been newly made with fresh sheets and a carefully folded quilt, and the dated curtains had been pulled back from the single rear-facing window.

Perhaps Will was not as inhospitable as he first appeared.

The other room was small and oddly shaped, the sloping ceiling making it cramped and impossible to use for anything but storage. There were more boxes of clothes here, smelling of damp and mothballs, the style and size marking the original owner as someone other than Will. Perhaps an older male relative such as his father, since it was doubtful that he would keep anything so unusable from the previous occupants of the house. There were some books and other unneeded items, an old television set and kitchenware that should frankly me thrown out, also boxed and stacked along the walls.

After checking the sightlines from all the windows on the floor, Hannibal made his way back downstairs, experimentally stepping around the creaky steps, and was satisfied with his near-silent descent.

The dogs were back inside, much to his dismay, but they were occupied at the moment, eating their dinner vigorously in the kitchen. (Oh *god*. In the kitchen.) Hannibal found Will near the front door, clutching blindly at the back of his desk chair as he stared out the window.

"You have a nice home, Will." He spoke gently, but Will still startled at the sound of his voice, turning quickly enough to nudge the chair out of its position with a scrape against the hardwood floor.

"Thanks." He mumbled automatically, though the flash of his eyes around the room betrayed his disbelief. And while the décor wasn't what Hannibal would have chosen for himself, it did carry a sort of charm for how well it seemed to fit Will's personality.

"Oh, um." Will brushed past him to stride into the little kitchen again, stepping around the dogs with ease. "Sorry. Did you want coffee or something?"

Hannibal eyed his coffee maker, a terribly clunky thing from the turn of the 21st century, and attempted to keep the horror off his face. “No, thank you.” He could bring a French press as soon as the next day, if he was able to make the trip to his house. “Though I appreciate the offer.”

He smiled politely, trying to put Will at ease, and stepped as close to the kitchen as he dared to at the moment. “Did you have plans for dinner?”

Will looked around his room as if he were lost, one hand rising to run restless fingers through the thick tangle of curls that graced his head. His distress was most pleasing, aesthetically. “Um, not really. I have… Some frozen meals.”

The subtle wince that flashed across his classical features and the light dusting of color across his cheeks told Hannibal that Will was already aware of what his houseguest might think of that suggestion. The fridge had been empty of anything close to edible when Hannibal had caught a glimpse inside earlier, so he resolved to push for a shopping trip the next day. In the meantime, it was a good thing that he always over-prepared.

“I brought along a few groceries, in case the need arose. Would you mind if I cooked something?”

“Yes, of course.” Will nodded immediately, clearly relieved. “Feel free to use… Whatever.” He gestured vaguely around the room. “I’ll just, um. I have papers to finish grading.”

Hannibal nodded in acceptance, letting himself back out into the chilled evening air as Will made his way to the desk and slung his briefcase up onto the chair to fish out the aforementioned essays.

He breathed out a sigh once he had stepped off the porch, allowing himself a moment of bitterness over the inconveniences that had arisen. It would simply require that he adjusted his expectations a bit. The animals would be difficult to accept, but their presence could be useful in a number of ways. It was clear that getting Will comfortable with him would take some patience and careful maneuvering, but he did not begrudge the challenge.

He took his time carrying in his duffel bag full of personal items and the reusable grocery tote holding food. He regretted not bringing a cooler with some of his meat to use, but he had not been sure how the day would end. He reassured himself that there would be many opportunities to feed Will Graham in the future.

Will remained engrossed in his grading, not even bothering to look up when Hannibal reentered the house and locked the door behind him, though he did tense slightly as the older man brushed past on his way to the kitchen. Content with the silence, Hannibal got busy in the kitchen after taking his duffel upstairs. Some of the dogs followed him with wagging tails, taking the chance to sniff at his pants as soon as he stood still enough to let them. He tolerated it, and was pleased to find that they left him alone after they had scented their fill, most retreating back to the living room to settle in front of the fireplace or near Will’s feet. Only one, a smaller mixed-breed with short hair, stayed in the kitchen, but he lay out of the way in the corner, more well-behaved than Hannibal had expected.

Mood lifting significantly, Hannibal happily washed his hands and wiped down the countertop before handling the food. He could feel the atmosphere settling, the static tension dissipating from the air as both men sank into their respective tasks.

Yes, they would coexist quite well. And over time, Hannibal was positive that he could coax Will into a more intimate living situation. They would engage in involved conversation one day, eye contact held steadily and faces lit with warmth from the fireplace, leaning close to one another as they sipped a dark wine.

He would see to it that the pleasing vision came to pass, one way or another.

We’re Sleeping In the Morgue

Chapter Notes

Hello again. Apologies for the long (*long*) delay. Life tends to get in the way sometimes.

This chapter: content warning for canon-typical manipulation and Hannibal being an all-around bad guy. He can't help it. It's just how he shows his love. No but seriously, not-okay behavior coming right up.

xx Sordid

Chapter Title:
Epilogue - The Antlers

Will wasn’t as miserable as he had feared he would be.

He couldn’t relax, not with someone else in his house, but Dr. Lecter was surprisingly adept at slipping into the ambiance of the evening and matching its tone. He didn’t fade into the background, he was far too strong a presence to do that, but he didn’t grate on Will’s nerves quite as badly as others might have.

Will did his best to concentrate on grading papers while his houseguest took over the kitchen. None of the students’ arguments were particularly creative or compelling, several of them missing the objective of the assignment by a long shot, and the dull ache at the back of his skull only grew and spread the longer he bent over the essays with his red pen in hand. By the time it got bad enough to warrant a trip to his discarded coat for his aspirin bottle, the smells wafting across the small space of his house had become mouthwatering.

He lingered by the coat rack for a few moments too long, peering towards the kitchen to catch a surreptitious glance of whatever was on the stove. Hannibal had draped his suit jacket over the back of a chair and rolled his shirtsleeves up, forearms flexing with more muscle than Will had expected as he stirred what appeared to be a boiling pot of pasta. Will didn’t even recognize the pan sitting beside it, heated by a spitting blue flame from his ancient stove.

He hadn’t seen, let alone smelled, a home-cooked meal like this in years. The last time he could remember was a Cinco de Mayo dinner he had been roped into at the home of his partner’s abuelita back when he was a beat cop for the NOLA PD. The heavy spice of crawfish gumbo was a far cry from the clean, crisp scent of tomato and crushed basil that now filled the room. His stomach growled hungrily and he hurried to sit back down at the

desk, cheeks growing warm even though he was sure the bodyguard couldn't have heard his intestines gurgle over the scrape and hiss of whatever he was sautéing.

He felt hungrier now than he had in weeks, appetite rearing its drowsy head from the depths of his tired body, and he dreaded the awkward necessity of infringing upon the kitchen to heat up his prepackaged dinner in the microwave. He would just have to wait until Hannibal was done in there. Preferably until Hannibal had finished his meal entirely and retired to the unused bedroom upstairs. His stomach could just suck it up until then.

He made it through another two-thirds of an unfortunately written paper while the quiet clamor of cooking slowly faded to the soft clink of ceramic dishes and cheap glass.

“Will you join me?”

Will startled, twisting around in his chair to peer back at Hannibal where he stood over the tiny kitchen table, lining up tarnished silverware with the edges of the plates he’d laid out. Two plates.

“Um…” He stalled, brain short-circuiting at the unexpected invitation. “That’s, uh, really okay. I have other stuff to make.”

Hannibal didn’t frown, but the tilt of his head and the pink flash of tongue against his lips indicated his disappointment just as clearly. “Nonsense. I made enough for two and it would be a shame to let the food go to waste.”

Will blinked at him for a moment longer before slowly pushing his chair back and standing up, fingers fumbling unnecessarily to straighten his shirt as he approached the table with caution. He felt like an intruder in his own home, and the jarring realization that Hannibal had *cooked* for him was only contributing to the untethered sensation.

“This isn’t part of your job description, is it?” He asked bluntly, watching Hannibal’s hands as the older man brought the pasta and vegetable-laden sauce to serve them at the table, since there wasn’t enough room on the narrow counter.

“Not at all.” Hannibal admitted mildly, leaving Will only more confused as to why this was happening. “It is simply a personal pleasure. One that I find myself willing to share, should the opportunity present itself.”

Will had to swallow back the saliva that flooded his mouth as Hannibal poured sauce over his plate, still steaming, and silently marveled at the amount of color gracing his usually bare table. He gave up any pretense of not being ravishingly hungry and pulled out his chair to sit. There were cloth napkins folded under the silverware. Had Dr. Lecter brought those with him? Had Will forgotten they were buried in a drawer somewhere? Self-conscious, Will waited with his hands folded in his lap, possessing enough awareness of social standards not to start before his guest (host? cook?) joined him.

“Pasta primavera with a fresh vodka cream and broccolini.” Hannibal announced primly, dropping a sprig of what looked like parsley atop each of their plates. And wasn’t that just… Fucking fancy.

“It looks… Very good.” Will complimented stiffly, feeling the expectation like fingers on his tongue.

Hannibal offered him a small smile as he sat, reaching to spread his napkin over his lap. “Let’s hope it tastes even better.”

Will copied him before picking up his fork, tempering his eagerness to make sure he wrapped a respectably sized bite around the tongs.

“Oh, god.” He moaned around the first burst of flavor on his tongue, eyes slipping closed in spite of himself. It was the best damn thing he’d tasted in years. Maybe ever. Fuck.

His neck grew hot when he felt the smug pleasure radiating from across the table, but that didn’t stop him from immediately gathering the next bite on his fork. They ate in silence for a minute or two, and Will had to consciously monitor his pace so that he wouldn’t end up shoveling the pasta into his mouth without pausing to chew. Hannibal didn’t seem the kind of man to tolerate such rude behavior.

“What does your schedule look like tomorrow?” Hannibal asked after a while, and Will’s eyes flickered up to watch him slide a tidy bite of food between his teeth. His gaze lingered a moment too long, vaguely fascinated by the shape of his mouth as he chewed.

“Not too busy.” He admitted, eyes returned to his own half-empty plate. “I don’t have class, but I should still go in to Quantico.”

“Are you working on a case?” Hannibal kept his tone only vaguely interested, but Will could sense the eagerness lurking beneath.

“Not at the moment, no.” He reached for his glass of water to wash away the slightly bitter taste appearing on the back of his tongue. Just the thought, the knowledge, of Jack’s next middle-of-the-night call to come look at the fresh bodies was enough to make him start to sweat. “No. I, uh, I need to be field re-certified so I can get my badge and service weapon back.”

He didn’t bother explaining why he had been suspended from field work in the first place. He knew that Hannibal knew, whether Jack had been the one to tell him or not.

“I see.” The good doctor had the decency not to play dumb, and the even more appreciated grace not to bring the subject up for discussion. “What will you have to do?”

Will shrugged half-heartedly. “The tests are scheduled for next week unless Crawford gets them pushed up. I should be fine on the hand-to-hand,” He had enough muscle memory from the police academy to last him a lifetime. “But my shooting could use some practice.”

Garrett Jacob Hobbs flashed across his vision, jolting as shot after shot blew through his body, painting the cabinets red. Will swallowed, and set down his fork.

“Might I join you?”

“Hm?” Will blinked towards him, the thread of conversation lost amidst his distraction.

“Would it be possible for me to join you, on the range tomorrow?”

“Oh.” The idea wasn’t entirely odd. Hannibal was sure to have weapons experience, given his occupation. “Sure. I could probably get you a visitor’s pass.”

Hannibal nodded, obviously satisfied with the response, and focused on his plate as he speared a vibrantly green piece of broccolini. Will took the opportunity to look over his face, wondering briefly if he was taking up the habit of avoiding Will’s eyes out of respect for his comfort, like Alana did. He wasn’t sure how he felt about that, if it was what Hannibal was doing.

“I would request that we take a trip to the grocery tomorrow, if you are amenable?”

For a moment, Will wanted to suggest that Hannibal could go on his own, since he clearly had much higher standards when it came to food and Will’s usual biweekly stop at the Walmart Supercenter would probably horrify him. But no, he couldn’t go alone even though it would certainly be more pleasant for both of them, because he was supposed to be watching Will. Like a glorified babysitter.

He stifled a sigh. “Sure. We could stop on the way back; there’s more options around Falls Church.”

“I would appreciate that.” Hannibal offered him a smile in token thanks. It felt strange to be in the position where he was deciding things for someone else. Will was used to being the one who acquiesced to the decision of others, who went where he was told to go, when he was told to go there, and did as he was directed. He had agency in his own home, but now even that was… Shaken. He found himself on uneven footing, still unsure of this dynamic and how it was supposed to work.

Despite that, they managed to make polite conversation for the rest of their meal. They only touched on innocuous topics, like the upcoming winter and how bad the weather got in Wolf Trap, a familiar book that Hannibal had spotted on the shelf, and how well behaved the dogs were. Will had trained them with dedication, doting his attention upon them when all other aspects of his home life fell neglected by the wayside. All but one lay contentedly in the living room while they ate, despite meals at the kitchen table not being a regular occurrence in Will’s house. Only Winston lay beneath the table, curled up near Will’s feet and not bothering to beg for scraps that he knew would not be given.

Will appreciated Hannibal’s attempts at kindness towards the topic of his dogs, though he could still feel the subtle, scornful disinterest clinging like gauze to Hannibal’s skin when he looked at the animals.

By the time both their plates were cleared, Will was feeling more full and physically contented than he had in weeks. Maybe months. His headache had abated and he could feel the tug of sleepiness weighing down upon his limbs and eyelids, despite the clock reading only half past nine.

“I’m taking the dogs out in the field.” He announced, pushing back from the table to stand. He expected Hannibal to insist on coming with him, but the older man just nodded in

acknowledgement as he carried the last of their dishes to the sink.

Happy to have a moment to himself and hopeful that the cool air would help wake him up, Will slung his jacket on and clicked his tongue to call the dogs to the door. They streamed out eagerly into the night, tails wagging and noses to the ground, and soon spread out over the large front yard. Will walked towards the tree line and looked up at the stars, hands shoved in his pockets. It was already cold enough for his breath to cloud in front of his mouth, and he made sure to count the dogs every minute or so to ensure that none wandered too far off.

The cold did rouse him for a little while, but it wasn't long before he was drifting again, a familiar fog descending on his mind. He called everyone back in and found Hannibal wiping down the counters again, the dishes from dinner already washed and drying on the small dish rack by the sink. He felt bad for not helping to clean up, especially since Hannibal had cooked, but he wasn't sure how to verbalize the sentiment. He resolved to do the washing next time, if this happened again.

"I think I'll retire upstairs for the night." Hannibal stated, drying his hands on a worn kitchen towel.

Will nodded, momentarily stalled by a mixed surge of relief and guilt at having the rest of the evening to himself.

"There's extra towels in the bathroom cupboard, so feel free, you know… Whenever you want to shower or anything." He glanced around the room, trying to remember if there was anything else Hannibal needed to know. "And more blankets in the bureau upstairs if it gets too cold." He typically made do with space heaters and sweaters until it got below freezing outside.

"Thank you. I'm sure I will be fine."

Will nodded again and tucked his hands into his pockets, at a bit of a loss.

Hannibal found it amusing, if the half-smile that turned up one corner of his mouth was any indication. He passed close by on his way to the stairs, pausing before ascending out of sight. "Goodnight, Will."

He cleared his throat, forcing himself to raise his eyes and meet Hannibal's placid gaze for another long moment. "Goodnight."

Something flickered there beneath the chestnut of his irises, but he disappeared upstairs before Will could decipher what it might be. Left with a silence that felt surprisingly empty, Will stood and watched the dogs settling down for a minute, listening for the creak of floorboards from above. None came.

Sighing to himself, he ran his hands over his face and through his hair, then got himself a glass of water and sat back down at the desk. It was still early, and he should try to finish the stack of grading before going to bed. Besides, he wasn't sure he would even be able to fall asleep with another person in the house, even if he couldn't hear a single sound of life from the second floor.

He only made it through a few paragraphs before his eyelids were drooping, muscles heavy and concentration slipping like water through his fingers as he tried to process what he was reading. He considered making coffee, but ultimately decided that he might as well take advantage of the exhaustion and try to get some sleep if he was able to. He trudged to the bathroom to take a piss and brush his teeth, checked that the dogs had fresh water for the night, and stripped off his pants before climbing between the sheets.

He was out in under a minute, carb-loaded and sleep deprived enough to avoid the usual racing thoughts and dull buzz of dread that kept him awake on most nights.

The woods were dark. Darker than usual, no moonlight filtering through the bare, twisting branches that stretched out above his head like claws grasping at the starless sky.

Will's feet sank into the forest floor with each step, dampened by wet leaves and decay, but he was glad for the near silence with which he was able to tread as he made his way deeper in. He held the hunting knife loose in his left hand, fingers curled comfortably around the grip, and stalked his prey.

He followed the stag's trail, eyes lingering on the tree trunks where antlers had scraped away patches of bark. After a few minutes, his ears pricked at the soft sound of a huff of air ahead. He froze, careful to set his feet silently, and held out a hand to signal that they pause. There, several meters ahead through a gap in the trees, the oily glint of wide black eyes and the scrape of hooves against the forest floor.

He glanced to his right, meeting Abigail Hobbs' eyes through the dimness. She smiled at him. He nodded.

They crept slowly forward.

Adrenalin thrilled through his veins as they neared the stag, and the absence of light made its coat looks black and velvety, its proud antlers smooth like polished bone. It's breath misted white as it snuffled along the ground for something fresh buried beneath the debris. His fingers tightened on the knife, and he looked for Abigail as he took his position on the animal's flank. She was steady in her approach, her gaze intent on her target, and Will felt pride warm in his chest as he watched her.

He took a breath, felt for their moment, and together they lunged.

It was a wild sort of elation, sinking his blade into the stag's heaving side and ripping downward with a surge of effort, watching her do the same just across from him, her jaw set hard and brow furrowed in concentration.

Their prey heaved and screamed, an agonizingly human sound, as it sank to its haunches and fell, struggling, to its side. Blood wet its soft fur, inky black and slick, and covered their hands up to the wrists, smeared along their forearms.

Will showed Abigail how to slice away the hide and pull out the entrails to leave for the wolves, his hands steady and blood-warm on the delicate bones of her wrists as her guided

her. Ideally they would have strung the stag up and drained it's blood to the hungry earth, but he found that he didn't mind the mess.

They were elbow deep in the steaming carcass, fingers searching out the fresh heart, when he felt a tremble in her fingers.

The tremble became a flinch, and in the next moment she was pulling away from his touch. He looked sideways at her, concerned, and watched as she raised one unsteady hand to touch the hollow of her slender neck.

As he watched, transfixed, her throat opened wide, spilling ruby waves down her smooth ivory skin. He met her wide, panicked eyes and felt his breath stall in his chest.

No.

No. No no. His hands reached blindly, desperately to staunch the flow but her neck was too slippery, too small beneath his hands. She gasped out, trying to speak, but all she could manage was wet and choking, the crimson stain glistening on her trembling lips.

She fell, pressed tight against the side of the stag, and jerked once, twice, three times before going still. Will fumbled for a place to put his hands. He shook her, dread turning his skin to ice, but she did not wake.

The sound of hooves on the forest floor, slow and steady, signaled the approach of another creature. Wild-eyed and shaking now with terror, Will stared out through the dark, but there was nothing to see. Still, the measured steps approached, growing louder and louder the closer they got.

His heart pounding a desperate staccato in his chest, Will stumbled to his feet and began to run. He was blind and stumbling, tripping over fallen branches and scraping his knuckles against trees, and still the hooves kept pace behind him.

His breath burned in his lungs and fear choked him, harsh and hot and delirious. A dead root caught on his foot and he fell, twisted, into a heap on the ground.

He scrambled onto his back, a scream perched just below the knot of his throat, and stared up into fathomless eyes. A twisted thicket of antlers rose above the creature's head, blocking out the sky, and its feathered pelt heaved with each great breath. It bent its head and Will jerked backwards in panic, sure that it would gore him on its antlers.

Instead, it pressed its warm nose to his cheek, startlingly soft and pliant, and its breath fanned hot against his skin.

He lay frozen for a long moment, hardly daring to breathe, before a cautious sense of safety allowed him to relax his tensed muscles. He held no delusions; this creature was dangerous. Deadly. But it wasn't going to hurt him now. Not… yet.

He sat up a little as the ravenstag nuzzled into his neck, scenting him, and didn't resist when it pressed in closer, rubbing its massive head against his hair. A warm sort of peace spread

like honey across his skin, slowly turning the bitter taste of terror on the back of his tongue to sweetness and pleasure.

He allowed himself to sink into it, eyes drifting shut as the animal continued its careful, affectionate exploration of him. He didn't touch, knew implicitly that he was not allowed the privilege, but he held still and moved pliantly when the creature nudged at him, eventually laying flat against the softened ground.

He fell asleep like that, warm and safe, caccoonned in the darkness of the forest with the stag standing over him. Watchful. Protective.

Hannibal was able to scrape together something that passed as an acceptable dinner, despite the poor circumstances in which he found himself. The stove nearly didn't light, but he had been able to coax two of the burners to life with a bit of care, and they did not starve.

Will was not the *worst* dining companion, though Hannibal found the topics of conversation to be a bit lacking. It seemed he would have to wait for his charge to warm to him before they could speak freely. It was frustrating, to know what unfathomable depths hid behind Will's classically beautiful visage, but not to have access to them. He was locked tight like a treasure chest, his freely emotive expressions just a tantalizing tease with no real glimpse inside.

Still, they had successfully arranged a plan for the following day which would work in Hannibal's favor. He found himself looking forward to the opportunity to peak at the FBI's certification procedures, not to mention Will's own skill set. It should be entertaining, if nothing else. And the promise of a trip to a real grocery (not whatever meager food mart Wolf Trap may have to offer) had put him in a much improved mood.

He chose to retire after the kitchen was cleaned up (as much as it could be in its current state, at least). He was conscious of Will's discomfort and aware that it would be beneficial to phase him into the idea of his constant presence. The profiler would surely clam up and cut himself off should Hannibal force his company on him in anything more than small, manageable doses until they had gotten used to each other.

He spent some time putting his things away in the small room provided, methodically wiping down the bureau and spare hangers before placing his clothes in their respective homes. He hadn't brought too much, but it would be enough to last him a few days, and he was sure that he would have the opportunity to return to his house and retrieve more before he had to do laundry. He shuddered to think on the state of Will's washer and dryer, which he had glimpsed just briefly in the downstairs hall. He would avoid using them, if he could.

He spent another half hour carefully storing weapons in strategic locations around the second floor, even climbing out his bedroom's window to hide a sniper rifle and a trench knife on the ledge that jutted out over the front porch. He was pleased to see that it would be an easy jump down to the ground from there, as well as an ideal vantage point from which to aim at the nearby tree line.

Silence fell downstairs shortly after Hannibal left Will to his own devices, and he could see that all the lights had been turned out when he stood at the top of the stairwell. It didn't surprise him that Will went to bed so early; he was very clearly sleep deprived.

He took his time, ensuring that Will and the slobbering animals were all asleep before he descended, careful to skip over the squeaky step. He'd loaded himself with several blades, one hand gun and one garrote wire, already decided on the best spots to place them where Will would not be likely to come across anything unexpected. Not that he thought Will would mind if he did discover the weapons, so long as none of the dogs were endangered. He clearly never had anyone else over to the house.

He stepped silently into the darkened living room, giving his eyes a moment to adjust. There was enough light streaming in through the front windows to illuminate the shapes of Will beneath his bed covers and the animals lumped together in front of the cold fireplace. Two of them had raised their heads at Hannibal's presence, peering curiously at him for a few moments before seeming to decide that he was not of interest and laying back down to sleep. A space heater hummed in the corner of the room, blowing painfully dry hot air through the house.

Will was a restless sleeper, his limbs twitching under the sheets. Hannibal listened to his harsh, uneven breaths for a long minute before retreating to the kitchen. He stepped intentionally on a loose floorboard, scraped a chair out of its place and put it back again. A few of the dogs shifted in their beds, but Will did not stir.

He placed his tools around the first floor, easily concealing a hunting knife in the unused breadbox and his loaded Sig Sauer in an empty space behind some books on the shelf furthest from the door. The garrote wire he tucked reluctantly into the tank of the toilet. He peered out of every window before retreating back upstairs, diligently performing his job even though he was sure there would be no threat. The nights here were dark and silent, broken only by the occasional distant call of wild animals.

He set the alarm on his watch and lay down atop the covers on the narrow, stiff-springed bed, folding his hands over his stomach and settling into a light sleep. He slept for two hours, breath and heart rate slow and even, and let his eyes flick open just before the soft beep of his watch broke the silence of the house.

Already primed to make another loop of the house and check the the view from the windows, Hannibal paused at the sound of rustling sheets and a complaining mattress from downstairs.

He lay still, waiting for the creak of floorboards or the clink of a toilet seat lifting. Hearing nothing, he carefully sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed. He had expected insomnia, but Will seemed like the type to get up and do something else when he couldn't sleep, rather than lie for hours in the dark, succumbing to the pacing of the mind.

Prepared to make excuses about checking over the house, Hannibal tread downstairs, letting his footsteps be heard this time so as not to startle Will. He rounded the corner into the living room and paused, taking in the motionless form standing at the foot of the bed, head bent and weight listing slightly to one side.

Curious, Hannibal stepped closer. One of the dogs whined lightly in distress.

“Will?”

He garnered no response.

He circled around until he could see the younger man’s face, lips parted and jaw slack, eyes lidded.

“Will?” He repeated, louder this time.

Still no reaction.

Sleep walking, then. How intriguing. Hannibal allowed himself a small smile, excitement sparked at the chance to explore this new development further.

He took a closer look, careful not to touch, and noted the sweat soaked t-shirt and loose curls sticking to the damp skin of his forehead. He leaned in and inhaled deeply, taking in the sweetened scent of sickness and sleep-hot breath, sweat and fear, a subtle sour tang clinging to the skin beneath the fever smell.

Fascinating.

Eager to see how this would play out, Hannibal stepped back to wait patiently and observe. He watched as Will’s eyes flickered behind their lids, his fingers twitching at his sides, and the minutes ticked by. Eventually, Will swayed forward, his weight shifting dangerously off balance before he took a faltering step. And then another. And another.

He approached the front door, blatantly unaware of the shifting and whimpering from two of the more perceptive canines, and fumbled to a stop in front of it. He reached up and gripped the doorknob, but did not yet turn it. He stood, trembling, his breaths heavy and noticeably quickening. Even from where Hannibal stood more than a foot away, he could small the acrid flood of panic seeping into the air like bitter fog.

This went on for a couple of minutes, Will’s agitation only steadily increasing until he was panting and twitching with it, his fingers clenching and unclenching around the doorknob. After some brief consideration, Hannibal decided that he ought to interfere before Will’s physical stress, or the act of opening the door to the cold air outside, woke him up. It wouldn’t do to alert the profiler to this set of circumstances too soon, provided that he didn’t know already.

He closed the distance between them and reached out, curious what would happen when he initiated physical contact. At his careful touch to one stubble-rough cheek, Will went still. For a moment, Hannibal thought he must have woken, but after several long heartbeats, Will’s breathing resumed and his arm fell to his side, face pressing ever so slightly into Hannibal’s palm.

How interesting.

Unhindered by caution and wanting to know how far he could push this, Hannibal trailed his hand down to the side of Will's neck and pressed gently, guiding the sleeping man to turn and face him. Will's eyes continued to move beneath their lids, but his muscles had gone lax and pliant. Hannibal wrapped his fingers securely around Will's throat and thought about squeezing. Instead, he let go and ran both hands through Will's hair. It was tangled and damp with sweat, but soft against his fingers. He let his grip catch slightly and tug, watching Will's face closely, and received a soft sigh in return.

His breath was slowing now, his scent returning to that sweet, overripe heat that reminded Hannibal of caramelized sugar and cough syrup. He slid his hands down to cradle the back of Will's head, stroking his thumbs once over his jawline. Not wanting to go too far and ruin the game too soon, he moved his touch to Will's shoulder and gently guided him back towards the bed.

Will went easily, steps a bit unsteady but very receptive to Hannibal's guidance. He brought them to a halt at the side of the bed and carefully stripped Will of his shirt, finding the idea of putting him back to sleep in old sweat quite unsavory. He dropped the soiled clothing to the floor and indulged in reaching out to trace the puckered scar of a stab wound on Will's left shoulder. The urge to know how it was put there itched beneath his skin, but he stifled it for another day.

He considered taking the boxers as well, but it was improbable that Will would remove those in his sleep, and he didn't want to raise any concerns. He bent to untangle the sheets before guiding Will back onto the mattress and nudging him to lie down once again. He settled without issue, eyelids fluttering but remaining closed as his head found the rumpled pillow. Hannibal covered him with the blankets and straightened back up, relieved to see that he was slipping back into a normal sleeping pattern almost immediately.

He stood over Will for a long time after that, watching him flit in and out of dreams, mind racing with a multitude of new possibilities. He liked Will like this, soft and pliable. The idea of being able to influence this body when the mind controlling it was usually so closed off to him was rather inspiring. He could do all manner of diverting things with him in this state.

Suddenly, Will Graham was the most interesting thing in the world.

Bite Marks, Deep In My Arteries

Chapter Notes

We're still plodding forward. The plot will accelerate eventually, moving inevitably towards the blood and the guts and a cannibal in love.

Please enjoy.

Chapter Title:
Damn These Vampires - The Mountain Goats

Will couldn't believe that he had let Hannibal talk him into this.

The Bentley's cream-colored leather seats were warm and comfortable, and the head rest didn't irritate the crick in his neck like his own car seats did. The temperature was somehow perfect without the vents blowing hot, dry air in his face, and the interior of the car even smelled pleasant. Like fabric conditioner and pine.

Will hated it. It was exactly what he hadn't wanted, to be driven around like he was incapable of getting himself to and from work. Like he couldn't be trusted with his own autonomy.

But Dr. Lecter had been so *reasonable*. Of course it would be more convenient, and even save on unnecessary fuel expenses. It was logical to carpool, and made perfect sense to take Hannibal's car so that he could run errands during the day, if he needed to. Will would have looked like a stubborn idiot not to have agreed.

And Hannibal had clearly arranged it to be just so. Will might have missed the blatant manipulation of the situation, if Hannibal hadn't smugly tacked on one more argument, stating that "it would be more convenient for me, if you wouldn't mind." He had assumed (correctly) that Will would be unwilling to further inconvenience his bodyguard. Even though it was himself that was most put out by this whole fucking circus.

Blatant manipulation, indeed. Will considered this new aspect of Dr. Lecter as he stared out the passenger side window, the highway disappearing smoothly beneath their tires as Hannibal drove them to Quantico. There was something reflective about looking at the man, like staring into a two-way mirror. Will knew that there was more on the other side, hidden things that made his skin prickle to think on, but all he could see staring back at him was calm smooth nothingness.

He found it somewhat unsettling and frustrating, just as much as it was a relief not to be nagged by every little thought and feeling that ran through Hannibal's head. Will would be

tempted to wonder if the man had feelings at all, but he could tell that he did. They were just carefully, skillfully glossed over. Tightly managed. It was a bit intimidating, to consider how much self-control that must take.

They didn't speak much during the journey; just a few brief comments about where they might stop for groceries later. Will was clearly lost in his thoughts, slow to rouse from his reverie, and he was grateful that Hannibal didn't seem particularly inclined to pull his attention elsewhere. The trip seemed to pass more quickly than usual, but he couldn't tell if it was because the Bentley drove faster than his station wagon or if he had simply zoned out enough to lose track of the passage of time. He mutely handed over his ID for Hannibal to show at the gate, and they parked in the employee lot.

He watched, somewhat incredulously, as Hannibal detoured to his trunk before they left the car and proceeded to divest himself of a concealed handgun and two small, but tactically efficient blades. They wouldn't be allowed in the building, of course, and Will had to remind himself that it was normal for Dr. Lecter to be carrying them elsewhere. He was on the job, after all.

The bodyguard was dressed more casually this morning, in contrast to his ridiculous outfit from the previous day. He nearly looked the part in a subtly expensive black turtleneck and versatile slacks. A more refined, eccentric version of a protective detail. Still entirely out of place beside Will's worn corduroy button down and dark jeans frayed thin at the knees and belt loops, but it was better. Less ostentatious, at least.

Will's headache had abated somewhat this morning, but he still wasn't looking forward to the bone-jarring sound of shots fired, even with the noise-cancelling earmuffs provided at the range. He swallowed two aspirin preemptively as they entered the building, Hannibal trailing just slightly behind him as he lead the way to the training facilities in the basement. He didn't have to ask if his companion wanted to join him rather than just tag along to watch (there was a quiet anticipation that was lingering around the older man, rubbing off on Will just enough to dampen some of his own reluctance), so he wordlessly showed Hannibal to the attendant.

He checked out a standard service weapon and collected a box of ammo, protective earmuffs and glasses at the counter while Hannibal signed the necessary waivers and was given a rundown of the range's rules, which he undoubtedly knew already. Then he found an empty stall and began to set up his first clip, ignoring the way his hands felt a bit clumsy, not quite steady.

He heard Hannibal come up behind him as he procrastinated, readjusting the fit of the earmuffs.

"What will you have to do to pass the recertification test?" He asked in that calm, pleasantly polite accent of his.

"Twelve out of fifteen in the inside quarter." He answered shortly, hooking the earmuffs over his neck and donning the glasses. "Demonstration of proper draw and reload procedures."

The test was frankly lacking, but he wasn't about to complain. It wasn't as if he would pass a psych eval anyway. Full agents had much more rigorous hoops to jump through, but they'd

hand out a gun to basically anyone working in the field. Even Zeller and Price carried service weapons when processing scenes. He had a feeling Beverly would carry regardless, like Jack did, even if it weren't standard policy.

He barely heard Hannibal's hum of acknowledgement as he slipped the muffs over his ears and reached for the Glock. His pulse thrummed loudly in the confines of his head, conspicuously accelerating as he loaded the chamber and flipped down the safety.

The cold metal was familiar in his hands, the weight of it like an extension of his body, but chilled, anxious sweat trickled down the inside of his shirt as he raised his arms to aim at the target already set up across the range. It was shaped vaguely like a man. The shadow of a profile. Head, shoulders, torso. His fingers trembled and he gripped the gun tighter, adjusting his stance as he pressed his lips together, breathing harder through his nose.

Trying to ignore the rising panic fluttering behind his ribs, acutely aware of Hannibal's continued presence behind his shoulder, he forced himself to squeeze down on the trigger. Each shot made him flinch, red splattering across white paint and dead, cloudy eyes. He dropped his arms after five, frantically flipping the safety and setting the gun down on the counter with a heavy clack.

He rubbed at his eyes for a moment, unsure if he had actually kept them open while he shot, and took a purposeful deep breath before slamming his hand down on the retrieval button that sent the target whizzing down the track towards him, paper flapping in the air like a ghost with Garrett Jacon Hobbs' face.

He avoided looking back at Hannibal's reaction, limiting himself to a soft grunt of disappointment to see the four wide bullet holes, all far from the center of the chest or head. One shot had apparently missed completely. It was an embarrassingly poor performance.

Determined to power through, choosing to believe that repetition would solve the problem, he quickly mounted another target and sent it flying back to the far end of the room. He plucked up the Glock once again, not allowing himself any hesitation despite the blood rushing in his ears, and took aim again.

"You're a weaver."

He narrowly avoiding jumping at Hannibal's comment, cleared his throat, and adjusted his stance again.

"I would have assumed the isosceles, instead." He continued, a faint thread of curiosity in the words. "Easier sightline, better for aiming."

Will couldn't tell if that was a very subtle insult or just an observation.

"I've got an old shoulder injury." He muttered, trying to focus on lining his sights up this time instead of just shooting wildly in the general direction of the target.

"Oh?" Yes, there was the curiosity, allowed to come forward in the lilt of Hannibal's voice. There was almost an artificial gloss to it. "What happened?"

He sighed once, his heart rate slowing slightly with the distraction, grip growing more steady. “Got stabbed when I was a cop.”

Hannibal said nothing else, but Will could feel the interest coming off him, almost painfully authentic now.

“You ever been stabbed, Hannibal?” He asked lightly, a small thrill running over his skin at the use of his first name.

“Once or twice.” He answered, the tilt of an amused smile clear in the words. “May I?”

And then his hands were on Will, warm and firm through his shirt. One gripped his forearm, adjusting the angle of his elbow, and the other pressed against the length of his flank, guiding his torso into a slightly deeper twist. Will held his breath as that hand slid lower, settling with too much familiarity on the back of his thigh to nudge his leading foot forward an inch or two.

The touch lingered, just a moment too long, as Hannibal bent to look down the length of Will’s arms. Then he dropped his hands and stepped back. “There.”

Will let his breath out in a slow stream, skin buzzing and thoughts staticky. He took careful aim and fired off six shots in quick succession.

Hannibal pressed the button when he lowered the gun and they both watched the target race towards them. Four out of the six were clustered closer around the center circle, the other two not far off. Will felt relieved, in spite of himself.

“Thanks.” He mumbled, feeling the obligation of politeness.

“My pleasure.” Hannibal responded, unfortunately sounding like he meant it.

He left Will alone after that, retreating to his own stall next door where Will could hear him taking shot after shot in even intervals, flurries of sound followed by short silences while he reloaded, interspersed with the occasional longer pause when he had to replace the target paper.

They practiced for another forty-five minutes, until Will’s shoulder was aching dully from the kickback and the tremor in his hands had returned. His accuracy had improved though, nearly perfect when he settled into the stance that Hannibal had adjusted. It looked like he might get his service weapon back, after all.

He dissembled his gun and circled around to Hannibal’s post, reluctantly curious, just in time to watch him release another perfectly even volley of shots. He stood very still, the muscles in his back and shoulders deceptively relaxed, one foot set just slightly ahead of the other. It wasn’t quite like any of the stances Will had learned at the police academy, or here at Quantico, either. It must work, though, because the stack of used papers on the counter sported perfectly circular holes in the very center of the chest and head targets.

He was impressed in spite of himself, even more so when Hannibal retrieved the last target and revealed three more perfect shots, this time in the center of the neck and one on each shoulder. “There’s a slight draft.”

Will blinked at him, nonplussed, as Hannibal smoothly dissembled his Glock and removed his earmuffs. He hadn’t worn the safety glasses, despite the range’s requirement that he do so. “Huh?”

He nodded back towards the range as he gathered everything into his hands. “Most likely a door propped open near the entrance or an open vent. Negligible, really, but enough to require a slight compensation. You might mention it to the attendant.”

“Oh.” He followed Hannibal back towards the rental counter, ignoring the curious looks from a couple of students as they passed by. “Sure.”

He didn’t mention it to the attendant. He was sure that no one else would notice, as it was extremely unlikely that they would have a sharpshooter in to practice anytime soon. He really had no idea how it had been apparent to Hannibal, either, but the man was evidently an expert in the field.

It made him wonder, not for the first time, how Hannibal had ended up in this line of work. He would take a wager that his path had not been a direct one.

Will lead them back to the elevators, disproportionately fatigued by the limited activities of the day so far, and pressed down on the button that would take them back to the main floor.

“Will you not be tested on hand-to-hand?” Hannibal questioned mildly, pulling Will’s attention from the soft red glow of the elevator read out.

“No, I will.”

“You don’t need to practice, then?”

He didn’t. There wasn’t the same mental block when faced with a living, breathing, FBI certified opponent in a well-lit room padded with gym mats. Besides, that test was much less strict than the firearms exam. Consultants and techs like Jimmy Price needed to pass in order to go into the field, after all.

He glanced sideways at the high collar of Hannibal’s shirt, curious as to why the bodyguard would be eager to see him practice combat. Was it just a professional interest, to gauge how well he would be able to protect himself in the case of an attack? Or something more… personally relevant? He mentally weighed the costs and benefits of finding out, and reluctantly decided that he wasn’t too burnt out for a small case study. Even if it probably wasn’t a good idea.

“I guess I could.” He conceded, leaning forward to press for another floor just as the doors opened up on the lobby. “Be my sparing partner?”

He could feel Hannibal's surprised pleasure, even though he wasn't looking at the man. His face probably wouldn't convey his feelings, regardless.

"I'd be happy to."

Will nodded, watching as the doors shut once again and they began to ascend. He thought he had some old gym clothes stuffed in a locker, left there months ago. More conscious than usual of being polite, a noticeable side effect of spending any length of time with the painfully well-mannered doctor, he thought to inquire if Hannibal would want to change. Perhaps he could find a tall, well-muscled trainee to lend some athletic-ware.

"Will you want clothes?"

"I believe I am already wearing some." The poor joke tricked Will into flicking an unamused glare in Hannibal's direction, only to be met with the soft warmth of amusement in his strange, maroon eyes. "And these should be just fine, thank you."

Will grunted in response and let his gaze fall away again, annoyed to feel the light heat of a blush crawling up his neck.

He strode away to change as soon as they reached their destination, leaving Hannibal without a word in a small, petty stroke of retaliation. He returned shortly in an old pair of track pants and a NOLA PD t-shirt that was more grey than white after so many years of use. He was not unaware of the path Hannibal's eyes travelled when he reappeared, sliding up and down his form with no attempt at subtlety, but enough clinical interest to avoid being inappropriate.

It was more crowded here than at the gun range, a fact that did nothing to reduce the buzzing pain in Will's head. Hannibal drew attention as they crossed the wide open room, with his dark clothing and commanding presence, no matter how mild-mannered a face he put on. And all the heads that turned towards them, all the curious looks and projected focus and self-indulgence and stress work outs and gotta push myself harder maybe next time I can be faster, better, save the next one and fuck I wish I had abs like that and he's hot, damn don't let him catch you looking maybe just one more dose they're not gonna drop tests again until next month at least gotta wrap this up I'm late already -

It took some effort to block it out. To not look.

They found an empty stretch of mats partially hidden behind a rack of equipment and that was fine. That was better. No one else in this corner, at least, even if he could still hear them all. Feel them. Pushing in on the edges of his mind, vying for his empathy.

Hannibal settled into an even stance, hands clasped loosely behind his back, and regarded Will expectantly. "What will you be expected to accomplish? Shall you try to restrain me?"

He blinked, letting his scattered focus fall back into place with Hannibal's guiding questions. "Subdue and restrain, yes. That's basically it."

The bodyguard nodded. Will waited for him to ready himself, to drop his weight and free up his arms, but he did nothing. After a moment, Will shuffled forward, closing the distance

between them with his arms awkwardly extended, ready to make a grab at him. He was not at all used to making the first move. In training and in real-world situations, he was always on the defensive, reacting to others' attacks.

He hesitated when Hannibal still made no move towards or away from him, his body just as relaxed as if he were standing in line for the movies. Impatient and more than a little annoyed, Will stepped in and reached to twist Hannibal's arm further behind his back to keep it pinned down.

Faster than he could change direction, Hannibal was moving. He swept forward with one foot, latching it around Will's ankle and knocking him off balance, and landed one sharp jab with the flat of his palm against Will's collarbone, effectively knocking him on his ass. He landed hard, all the breath leaving his lungs in one sharp huff, and was left staring at the ceiling, momentarily stunned.

He decided that he really didn't like making the first move.

"Again." He muttered when Hannibal offered him a hand up. "You come at me this time."

"I suppose that would be more realistic." He acquiesced easily, unruffled by Will's demanding tone.

They reset back to their original positions, and this time Will watched his opponent much more closely. It was usually easy for him to predict what people would do in the next instant, which direction they would move or how they would try to strike, or run. They all betrayed themselves with a flick of the eyes, tension in certain muscle groups, a multitude of subtle signs and indications of what they would choose to do.

He watched for these signs as Hannibal took his turn advancing forward, watched as he neatly dodged a swing of Will's fist and seamlessly used his own momentum to catch Will by the back of his ribs and send him stumbling in the opposite direction.

Hannibal emitted nothing. Will couldn't tell if he just had an infallible poker face, or if he didn't actually know himself what he would do in the next fraction of a second. Perhaps he relied solely on his finely honed instincts, moving only when he absolutely needed to, only when the timing was just right. For each action he made seemed precisely placed and intentionally timed, expertly controlled.

He moved like no one Will had ever fought before, and the realization was simultaneously frightening and perhaps, just a little bit, exciting.

The set themselves up again and started it all over, slowly getting used to each other. It took a few more times of Will being gently, but firmly knocked aside before he stopped holding back and Hannibal began using some actual technique in response. A couple of rounds later, Will managed to get an arm around Hannibal's collar bone and kick out the back of one of his knees, forcing him partway to the ground (he had the feeling that he was allowed this rather than genuinely earning it) before Hannibal twisted out of his grip and used Will's body weight to fling him to the not-so-padded mat below.

Will was left panting, his shoulder aching worse than before, with sweat sticking damp at the small of his back. Hannibal didn't appear to be winded in the least, though his hair was falling soft across his forehead, knocked free of the more severe style he had so far kept it in.

"Was that Krav Maga?" Will asked, taking the proffered hand once again and allowing himself to be pulled easily back to his feet.

Hannibal inclined his head. "In part."

They went again. And again. And Will found, sometime between getting kicked in the ribs and twisting a handful of Hannibal's soft shirt in his fist, that he was actually somewhat enjoying this. His heart was racing, but his usual anxious dread was a faint echo in the back of his mind. His body ached with fatigue but it felt nice, for the first time in a long while. He wanted to keep going, keep pushing.

And he was seeing more, the longer he watched Hannibal move. The more his bodyguard laid hands on him, always restrained, always backing off before unnecessary pain was inflicted. He still made each move with exacting precision and gave no sign of where he was headed in the next moment, but there were flashes, here and there.

When he pinned Will down or landed a particularly quick or unorthodox strike, he could see it. A feral glint in the dark depths of Hannibal's eyes. A flash of something predatory, something hungry, there and gone again so fast that Will wasn't entirely sure he didn't just imagine it.

But he didn't. Imagine it. He could feel it lingering beneath Hannibal's skin, closer to the surface now, just a bit. Hannibal was clearly not averse to showing off, and he relished in gaining the upper hand regardless of how easy it might be for him. There was a comfort in it that struck a warning bell in Will; a familiarity with moving with intention. A certain ease with being ruthless. Deadly.

Hannibal was very experienced. An expert, evidently. In more than just fighting. He knew what it was like to subdue someone with violent force and land the fatal blow. He knew it intimately.

It was a leap, to be sure. An assumption made from scraps and half-formed thoughts, but Will felt it. And he was certain that it was true. Just as he was certain that he should be bothered by it, more than he was.

Yet he couldn't summon the fear, the suspicion, as he grabbed a towel from the counter and bent to take a long pull from the drinking fountain. Even with Hannibal's eyes still lingering on his back, he only felt… Cautiously intrigued.

A dangerous thing, to be intrigued. Nothing good ever came of digging into someone. Not when he did it with killers and definitely not when he did it with acquaintances. It would be utterly reckless with someone who might be both.

When he went to retrieve his old gym bag from the cubby he had stuffed it in, his phone was buzzing in the outer pocket. He fished it out, mouth twisting into a frown, just in time to see

the call go to voicemail. His stomach dropped when he read Jack's name on the dimming screen, next to the notification for two missed calls.

His mind raced with flash shots of bodies. Strung up. Tucked into bed. A pool of blood sticky thick like melted chocolate after drying on the linoleum. The smell of spoiling meat and the buzz of gnats that always got in no matter how tightly the scene was sealed off.

He took a shaky breath and unlocked his phone.

"Everything alright?"

He ignored Hannibal, stepping out into the hall as he forced himself to press Jack's name and call him back despite the unsteadiness of his hands and the twisting sickness of nerves in his gut.

It rang four times before the line was picked up, because fuck Jack Crawford.

"Are you in the building?" He answered without bothering to utter a greeting.

Will swallowed compulsively, and it took him a second to make his vocal chords work. "Yes."

"Is Lecter with you?"

Panic tasted bitter on the back of his tongue. "Yeah. Why?"

"Tell him to come pick up his paperwork. It's all been signed and we made the necessary copies."

"Is that all?"

"No. I need to you to come to an appointment tomorrow morning."

Will sagged against the wall, sighing heavily as his tension released enough for him to feel like he could breathe again. "What appointment?"

"Dr. Chilton at the BSHCI has agreed to meet with us about your secret admirer."

He grimaced. "Why?"

"He might have insight into the profile we're trying to build." Will scoffed. "And he implied that one of his inmates may be involved in some way."

Flaring anger made Will bare his teeth in disdain. "He doesn't have shit, Jack. He's just trying to get access so he can gawk at the details and probably leak it all to Tattle Crime in time for the weekend edition."

"Maybe." Jack conceded. "But I'm not going to pass on potential info just because the man likes his gossip."

“I don’t need to be there.”

“Yes you do. I need to know what’s bullshit and what’s real.”

“I can already tell you that.”

“I’m not asking, Graham.” Jack’s raised voice sounded tinny on the cellphone speakers, but it still made Will flinch. “Eight-thirty tomorrow morning.”

He hung up, and Will let the phone drop from his ear with a displeased huff, raising his other hand to rub at his eyes. The headache was back with a vengeance just at the thought of dealing with that vile excuse of a psychiatric professional. When he pushed himself off the wall and blinked his eyes open again, Hannibal was standing nearby with a purposeful air of bemused curiosity.

“We have to go into Baltimore tomorrow.” He answered the unspoken question. “Disgustingly early.” He added, though he got the sense that Hannibal was an early riser regardless.

“And what will our destination be at such an ungodly hour?” He inquired, lightly teasing.

Will could only sigh again. “A field trip to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.”

The doctor’s eyebrows rose a fraction of an inch. “How thrilling.”

“Sounds more exciting than it is, I assure you.” He started towards the locker rooms, ready to get out of his sweaty clothes, now cooling unpleasantly against his skin. “Oh, and Jack says you can come by to pick up your, uh, contract, I guess.”

“That is fortunate timing.” He sounded pleased. “I shall do that while you change and meet you back here shortly.”

Will nodded his agreement, not bothering to look over his shoulder before disappearing into the damp heat of the locker room.

He found an empty corner and sat on the bench for a while before he worked up the energy to change, letting the last couple of hours settle in his mind.

He had known that there was much more to Hannibal Lecter than initially met the eye, even his, but catching a brief glimpse behind the veil had only produced more questions than answers. It was clear what the smart choice was, but he was unsure if keeping his eyes averted would be possible. Not when they were living in such close quarters. Trapped in constant contact.

Hannibal may not bleed his inner self all over the walls like other people did, but he still filled a room. And Will’s mind was a vessel with too much space; he didn’t have the strength to keep the lid on indefinitely. His forts were built on sand, crumbling into the sea faster than he could maintain construction.

He would just have to hope Hannibal's control was as flawless as it appeared. If he could keep his secrets, than Will wouldn't have to.

Even if a part of him, hastily bound and gagged, might want to.

They Could See It Through My Skin

Chapter Notes

Writing for Hannibal can be such a challenge, but I love the way he gets beneath your skin.

Apologies for the hiatus. I hope you enjoy, my lovelies.

Chapter Title:
Westfall - Okkervil River

Hannibal adjusted his grip on the steering wheel, fingers curled loose over the cool, smooth leather. It was a beautiful morning, the sun still low on the horizon bathing the countryside in bright, unabashed yellow dew. He could almost see the appeal of living out here in the middle of the wilderness with mornings like these.

Will, on the other hand, clearly did not move to Wolf Trap for the picturesque sunrises. He was slumped in the passenger seat of Hannibal's Bentley, head propped against the window and jacket wrapped tight beneath his crossed arms. The shadows under his closed eyes were a dark smudge of purple on pale skin and his mouth looked to be fixed in a permanent half-grimace. It was mildly unattractive on him.

Hannibal inhaled and exhaled slowly to avoid sighing, taking note of the saccharine sleep-soaked Will scent that was already beginning to linger on the upholstery. He was aware that the profiler had not rested well the night before, though to his disappointment it had been more a plague of insomnia than somnambulism. He had listened from upstairs as Will thrashed restlessly atop his squeaky bed frame for a couple of hours, followed by a stretch of silence while he got up and sat at his desk, only to be found staring blankly out the front window, laptop screen dark in front of him, when Hannibal quietly made his rounds before daybreak. The familiar way in which he put on the sputtering, antique coffee maker and dragged himself into the shower with grim practicality when his alarm sounded made it clear that this sort of night was not uncommon in the Graham household.

Sleep deprivation could be the cause of the sweet fever scent that clung to his skin beneath the cheap bar soap and sweat, Hannibal mused, though it was likely in conjunction with something else. He would certainly have a lowered immune system caused by prolonged stress, which could allow common viruses to linger for weeks, even if most symptoms were kept to a minimum while his exhausted body worked overtime against invaders.

An opportunity for another day, certainly.

Will did not rouse himself until they were more than half-way to the Baltimore State Hospital and encountering a bit of early rush hour traffic as they entered the city. He sat up with a soft groan and rubbed at his eyes as if he were trying to push them into his skull. Hannibal nearly informed him of the strain that could put on his extraocular muscles, especially when already fatigued, but he decided to hold his tongue since it really didn't matter to him one way or another. His mind flashed briefly to a pleasing image of William with his eyes plucked out, weeping blood over the delicate lines of his cheekbones. He made a mental note to draw it later. Perhaps with flowers planted in the dark, empty sockets. Sprigs of purple dianthus barbatus. Or blue forget-me-nots.

No, better to leave them empty. Hannibal liked the way that looked on him.

Will huffed a sigh as he blinked blearily at the traffic and reached for his travel mug in the center console, taking a long sip.

"We should arrive in less than half an hour." Hannibal informed him, to fill the silence and provoke conversation.

The profiler just nodded mutely and stared through the windshield, cradling his abysmal coffee close to his chest, as if he were chilled despite the comfortable temperature inside the car. Two minutes passed in silence before he spoke in sleep-rough words.

"You haven't always been a bodyguard, have you?"

Hannibal felt his face go momentarily blank as the question registered, genuinely surprised by the sudden choice of topic. He recovered quickly, though he would later return to the puzzle of what lead Will to ask something so direct.

"No." He answered casually, flicking his gaze sideways to Will's averted blue eyes. "I was a surgeon previously."

Will looked towards him at this reminder, and Hannibal struggled not to linger too obviously on the man's expression before turning his attention back to the road. He had a slight twist of a smile on his baroque mouth, more knowing than anything genuine, though he kept his gaze lowered to Hannibal's shirt collar. "But you haven't always protected life."

It was not a question. The words were spoken with a sort of flippant confidence. Understated, without challenge. Like it was just something he picked up along the way. And it left Hannibal uncomfortably off step. The observation was more keen than he would prefer, the wording too precise to misinterpret. He had to admit that he had not anticipated this sort of insight. Not so quickly, at least.

He found that he must weigh his response carefully, though each second that ticked by in silence was an admission in itself. He would have to give something up, allow Will some version of the truth here, if he hoped to lay a foundation of trust and avoid proving himself to be blatantly disingenuous. He could allow for that. It was not often that he had the inclination, let alone the necessity, to use vulnerability as a weapon.

He mused, with some satisfaction, that the both of them seemed adept at doing so.

His course decided upon, Hannibal wet his lips and allowed his brow to crease in slight discomfort. “Not always, no.” He spoke with hesitance, as though reluctant to share the details. “There was a time, many years ago, that I briefly fell in with the wrong crowd, as they say.” He allowed a self-deprecating chuckle. “It was a quite a nasty crowd, indeed.”

He expected William to probe further, digging in for details with pointed questions and absorbing each scrap of information as befit his investigative nature. Instead, he simply hummed in toneless acknowledgement and turned back to the scenery outside his window. Hannibal was left to wonder if he was remaining willfully blind or if he’d already traced the shape of things with those sharp blue eyes of his. A clever mind could make the correct assumptions, from the careful confession Hannibal had just made. Correct on the surface of things, at least. It would be interesting to see if Will would uncover the rest, in time.

It was almost a shame that Hannibal would likely have to take care of his loose ends before the profiler realized the entire truth of just who was living under his roof. But only almost, as he was very much looking forward to all of the ways he could take this man apart.

They reached the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane without further conversation. It was a large building, grey and imposing on the outskirts of the city, with flowers planted beside the front steps. Poppies, far too bright for the setting and ill-fitted for the current climate. They were already wilting unattractively in their stone basins. Hannibal had never been to the hospital before, although he had read about it extensively. In another life, perhaps, he would have enjoyed pursuing a career in psychiatry. He already knew the pleasure of taking a feeble mind into his capable hands and sculpting it to his liking.

“Jack’s inside.” Will muttered to him as they left the parking lot, nodding to a nondescript SUV apparently belonging to the agent. Hannibal took note of the license plate number and followed Will inside, peering around himself with poorly masked intrigue.

“They keep the inmates on the other floors.” Will remarked wryly as he fiddled with his cuffs, eyes slicing sideways in a flash of knowing amusement, as if he could tell how much of Hannibal’s expression was feigned. “Just administrative offices here.”

“A wise choice, I’m sure.”

They lingered in the lobby for just a moment before a man appeared, dressed in grey orderly scrubs. The name tag pinned to his collar identified him as M. Brown. “Mr. Graham and security, I presume?”His expression was friendly and open, though his eyes lingered on Will with some prejudice, too intent. The profiler nodded without looking up, cleaning his glasses on the edge of his untucked shirt to avoid direct interaction. It was because of this that he clearly did not notice the appraising flick of Mr. Brown’s gaze down the length of his body. But Hannibal did.

“Follow me, please.” The orderly smiled harmlessly and ducked his head, a convincing picture of polite deference. “Agent Crawford has already been shown to Dr. Chilton’s office.”

They filed up a mahogany staircase to the second story and followed Mr. Brown down a carpeted hallway to a heavy door with a brass nameplate. He knocked before pulling the door open for them to enter.

“Ah, wonderful!” Declared a small man from behind a massive desk, immediately calling everyone’s attention to himself. “Thank you, Matthew.”

“Anytime, Doctor.” Matthew spoke to Chilton, but he didn’t look away from Will’s turned back until he left the room and closed the door behind himself.

Hannibal looked around as Will stalked forward to the empty chair beside Crawford’s and pulled it out to sit. It was an excessively ostentatious office, every detail from the curtains to the book cases designed to give the impression of status and accomplishment. The decor was also painfully outdated, even for someone who admired the classical. He stationed himself near a line of windows after Agent Crawford acknowledged him with nothing more than a nod, his genial treatment dissolving in the presence of someone else whom he aimed to ingratiate to his benefit.

Chilton smiled down at them as he stood behind his padded desk chair, caressing the leather back of it possessively. “We’ve been waiting a few minutes, Mr. Graham. I would have thought you eager for information regarding your… Special friend.”

“Traffic.” Will muttered, rudely fishing an aspirin bottle from his pocket and shaking two pills out to swallow dry.

“Ah.” Chilton, smile turned strained as he looked down his nose at the profiler, clearly trying to formulate a response that was both disapproving and polite. “The morning rush hour can be trouble. That’s why I prefer to get out ahead of it; early bird gets the worm and all that.”

Jack Crawford cleared his throat. “Now that we’re all here, Doctor, why don’t you tell us what you’ve found?”

The smile that Chilton turned on him showed too many teeth, more of a grimace than the welcoming expression he surely meant to convey. “Of course. Better to skip the small talk in a situation such as this.”

He took his time pulling out his chair and settling into it. He was still positioned far enough above the other seated parties that Hannibal strongly suspected he had the chair seat padded, and wondered idly if his feet dangled above the ground like a child’s. The bodyguard settled himself in a comfortable stance beside the window, out of Will and Crawford’s sights, and clasped his hands loosely at the small of his back. Though he found rudeness unforgivably distasteful, being ignored as the hired help did occasionally have its advantages.

Chilton waited to speak long enough that Will shifted impatiently in his chair, fingers tapping restlessly at the knee of his crossed leg. The slight upward twitch of the doctor’s mouth indicated how much he enjoyed the attention. “I assume you’ve heard of a certain killer popularly known as, the Chesapeake Ripper?”

There was a beat of heavy silence, savored by the smug little man.

Ah. Interesting after all, was he?

“Of course.” Agent Crawford broke the silence with slow, careful words, leaning forward in his chair with cautious interest. “What does he have to do with this?”

“Well.” Chilton folded his hands atop the desk with an unspoken *I’m so very glad you asked.* “I have reason to believe that these little threats may, in fact, be coming from the Ripper himself.”

The next long beat of silence was broken by Will’s exasperated sigh. “Jesus Christ, this is ridiculous.”

The gleeful expression on the doctor’s face quickly soured, but Crawford spoke up before he could protest.

“Will - ”

“The Chesapeake Ripper didn’t write those letters, Jack. God, of all the baseless theories to come up with…”

“Now hold on, Will. We don’t know - ”

“There’s no way the Ripper wrote those fanatical - He’s not… He’s not delusional, Jack. He’s not a zealot, he’s precise. He doesn’t worship this idea of ascension, because he’s already ascended. He has no reason to beg attention like this, he never has. His work speaks for itself.”

Hannibal felt as if he were holding his breath, although he continued to inhale and exhale with metronomic precision. Listening to Will spew forth his perceptions of the Ripper was an experience the likes of which he had never come across before.

“Ah, but he does have a reason to go looking for attention.” Dr. Chilton was leaning forward across his wide desk, desperate to shift the focus back to his carefully designed announcement. “You see - ”

“There’s a dozen other reasons that it’s definitely not him.” Will interrupted, shaking his head derisively. Hannibal eyed the clench of his fingers around the arms of his chair, observed the way the profiler grew sharpened and direct with the knowledge of his correctness. “The Ripper would never ramble like that. And he’s an empiricist. He may believe in god, as he certainly holds an appreciation for the divine, but he approaches this world with a rationalism bordering on ideology. He has never displayed this type of psychosis and I find it highly unlikely that he ever would. Not to mention the idea of anonymous threats would be too crass for him. Too… Rude. If he were ever to send a letter to the FBI he would sign it. The audacity would appeal to him.”

To his quiet astonishment, Hannibal found himself suppressing a smile, something akin to elation leaping briefly behind his ribs. He’d always imagined law enforcement to be bumbling behind the scenes, stomping clumsily over his art with no appreciation for the poetry he wrote in flesh and blood. He had no reason to believe that anyone working on his cases actually understood what it was that he did. Not many in this world would be capable of such comprehension.

Was this what it felt like to be seen?

Crawford had a pinched look of stifled disappointment about him, and Chilton was not so quietly fuming where he sat, very nearly pouting at his grand reveal being so thoroughly spoiled.

“Don’t you at least want to know how I came upon this information?”

“Please.” Crawford gestured for him to continue, though it was clear that his expectations had fallen.

Will didn’t bother to hide the exasperated roll of his eyes, and Hannibal watched with amusement as Chilton’s face flushed an unattractive, splotchy red.

“Well, you *see*…” He paused for dramatic effect, but it fell tragically flat. “The Chesapeake Ripper is already in custody. Right here, in fact. In this very hospital.”

No one gasped or clutched their breasts in shock. Jack Crawford frowned in disbelief. “How?”

Chilton deflated a bit, expression flattening into annoyance, though he continued with an unnecessary air of theatricality. “You’ll recall the case of Abel Gideon? Murdered his own family at Christmas dinner almost three years ago.” He paused for confirmation, but no-one spoke up. “Well he’s been remanded to my establishment and ever since he’s been taken into custody, there have been no more Ripper killings. Not a one.”

“That we know of.” Will muttered, clever thing that he was.

“Still.” The doctor flashed him an ineffectual glare. “Quite a coincidence, no?”

“Hardly.”

“Graham, let him speak.” Jack ordered, reminding Hannibal that even the director of the BAU was a willing idiot in the end, desperate for any chance that his White Whale may be defeated.

Chilton smoothed down the front of his mid-priced suit jacket, gathering his composure back to himself. “I’ve been treating Gideon on a biweekly basis, and we’ve been making substantial progress in recent sessions. He’s beginning to remember things that may have been buried in the recesses of his fragile mind. Crimes he may not have been aware that he committed before his psyche cracked in the presence of his poor wife and her family.”

Will’s huff of incredulity was ignored.

“Like all of our inmates, Gideon is entitled to privacy in his outgoing mail. And he has expressed some interest in our Mr. Graham when the topic of the FBI came up in our conversations. He has even alluded to his involvement in the threats being made.”

“The threats you told him about?” Will asked pointedly.

“They came up organically.” Chilton hedged. “You should speak to him; he’ll tell you himself.”

To Hannibal’s entertainment, Agent Crawford seemed to genuinely be considering it.

“And he is *very* interested in you, Mr. Graham.” Chilton stared at Will with a mixed expression of derision and fascination. “He’d read about you in the psychiatric journals, you see. All about you and your… empathy disorder.”

Will bared his teeth in a mirthless smile. “You do like to leave those lying around, I’m sure, Doctor. In the hopes that anyone, even the criminally insane, will read your speculative articles.”

It took a bit of effort for Hannibal to stifle his smirk as Chilton’s face twisted in comic indignation.

“I’m sure you’re aware of current psychiatric guidelines, Frederick.” Will stood and gathered his jacket from the back of his chair, dismissive. “And as such, I’m sure that you will not be putting your stock in such unreliable tactics as psychic driving.”

“I am *not* - ”

“If Abel Gideon thinks that he is the Chesapeake Ripper, it’s only because you have suggested it to him.”

“You’re just bitter because you weren’t the one to catch him.”

“Neither were you, Doctor.”

Chilton seethed, his skin flushed with childish anger once again. He glanced at Crawford, who was staring at the carpet with a thoughtful expression, and tempered his voice to sound more reasonable. “Gideon was a surgeon. He has the medical know-how to commit the Ripper’s crimes and the timelines all match up. It would be foolish not to consider the possibility.”

“We’ll look into it.” Jack conceded with a slow nod. Will turned away from the both of them with a scornful click of his tongue. “We will, Graham.”

“You can talk to him, Jack. I’m not wasting my time on this.”

“You’ll do as I tell you to do.” Jack stood, keeping his posture polite although his stature made the gesture inherently intimidating. “We need to chase down every lead we have, whether you think it’s worth your time or not.”

Hannibal watched the muscles in Will’s jaw twitch as he stared towards the door, avoiding Crawford’s pointed gaze, and wondered what was putting the fear beneath his skin this time.

“Have Alana speak to him. He knows her already, probably likes her, in some capacity. He’ll open up easier. And she’s familiar with his profile; I’m sure she’ll be able to see through whatever this is.”

He left without waiting for a reply, bursting into movement like a rabbit startling from the underbrush, and stepped out into the hallway with Hannibal sliding easily into his slipstream to block his retreating back from the other's gazes. He made a point to pull the heavy office door shut behind them.

"Leaving so soon?" Matthew Brown was lurking in the hallway, presumably waiting to escort them back to the lobby once they had finished.

Will occupied himself with shrugging on his jacket, staring down unnecessarily as he fiddled with the zipper. "We're finished here, thank you."

Hannibal observed the gleam of delight in Mr. Brown's dark eyes upon being addressed. There was that predatory focus, not quite masked beneath his mild-mannered demeanor. Curious, Hannibal stepped forward before Matthew could respond and took Will by the arm.

"This way, I believe." He casually steered the profiler back towards the staircase at the end of the hall, his touch light enough to be professional but gratuitously intimate all the same. Presumptive, even.

Will glanced once in his direction, eyeing his shirt collar with some scrutiny, but allowed him to do so without protest. Hannibal offered the orderly a parting nod as they passed by, using the gesture to take in the inscrutable expression that flickered across his ordinary face.

"Pleasure meeting you." Matthew called lightly after them, making no move to follow them out.

Interesting, indeed.

Hannibal left the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane in a splendid mood, delighted by the developments of the morning. Will didn't speak at all during their drive back through the city, but he didn't mind the silence. His thoughts were well occupied, meditating on the nature of fear born from empathy and formulating plans for the future.

Will Graham operated from a place of near-constant stress, driven by an intimacy with terror that most could not hope to comprehend. They misunderstood what drove him, and thus misused and mistreated his keenest gifts.

Men who operated out of fear were capable of great and terrible things.

He wondered what Will was capable of, and suspected that it was much more anyone might expect from a scared, twitchy, defensive little man wrapped in protective layers of disagreeableness. He was curious about what he would do, if pushed to the edge. Curious what he would do if pushed past it.

Perhaps it was time, at long last, for the Ripper to end his hiatus.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!